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ARGOSY

RED STAR MAGAZINE 4-19

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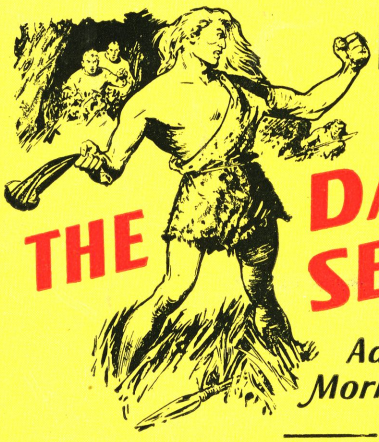
WEEKLY



Frederick C. Painton

THE DAWN-SEEKERS

Exciting Adventure in the Morning of the World

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Breathtaking Novel of the U.S. Battle Fleet

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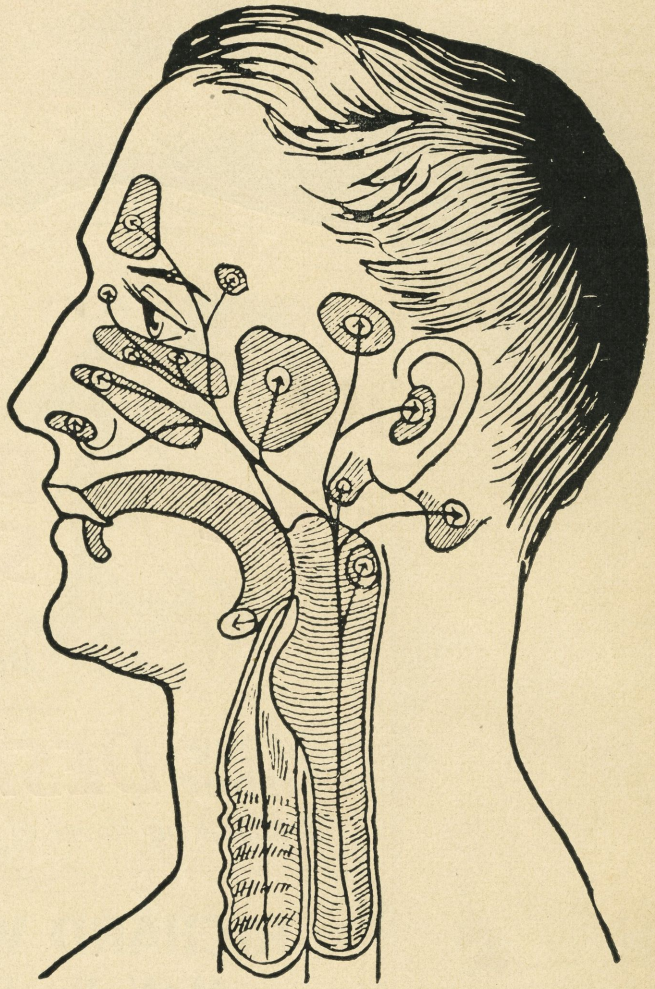

Some of the shaded portions of this diagram show the "air spaces" of the head. Catarrh often collects in many of these places and causes the disagreeable Catarrhal Symptoms.

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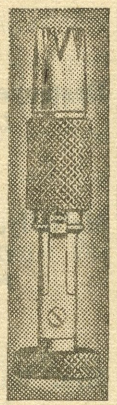

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

A **RED STAR** *Magazine*

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Editorial

WE have one more step to announce in the progress of ARGOSY. It is an important step forward—a change that is absolutely necessary. We know it is justified, because the readers as well as the editors have felt for some time that the present ARGOSY cover is not right for the magazine.

So we are going to change it. Next week—the April 26th issue—ARGOSY will be wearing a new face; and we are certain that you will be pleased with it. In fact, we were really excited when we first saw the design, for we had the feeling that here was precisely what we had always wanted for an ARGOSY cover.

Probably the most striking feature of this new cover is its modernity. The design is simple, and it catches the modern tone without being at all freakish. If you get your ARGOSY at a newsstand, you'll pick out this cover much sooner than you did the old one, for another of its strong qualities is its visibility. You'll see ARGOSY, and you will be proud to ask for a copy.

For some time we have felt that the news-reel effect on the present cover was not suitable, and we know that a number of you agree with us. Next week that will be gone, and the cover taking its place will feature a different illustration each week. So keep your eye out for the April 26th issue; examine its face and let us know what you think of it. Our feeling is that ARGOSY has finally been given the kind of cover it deserves.

—The Editors

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IF you are normal, you want the comforts and luxuries which are the by-products of success—a home of your own—a new car—the leisure to read—the means to travel.

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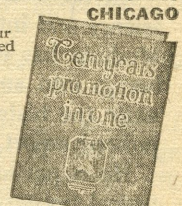

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The Dawn-Seekers

Shouting his defiance at the attacking brown men, Mal raised his sling

Back to the beginning of man they went—to forests of peril where roamed the saber-tooth cat, the hairy Neanderthal. And before they returned, they were to see terror such as had never been recorded. A startling new novel of Joel Quaite, time detective

By Frederick C. Painton

Author of "Man Alive," "The Golden Empress," etc.

FOREWORD

IN THE year A.D. 2500, a new variety of man has come upon the earth. A man five feet tall or less, possessed of the so-called Carveth "efficiency body," only large enough to nourish the enormously enlarged skulls which became a foot in diameter in 2340.

All races and nations are united in the Earth Union; science and intellect rule the universe. Professor Anthony Modesta has invented a machine that can project human beings into any past period of time; and he is eager to write the history of the earth, not from legend and prejudiced report, but from actual observation.

He is particularly anxious to investigate the great historical mysteries that have baffled man through the ages, and advertises for two men to act as "time detectives" to go back to record the actual occurrences.

For such time detectives he needs men six feet or over, the kind called freaks and monstrosities in 2500. Joel Quaite and Tex O'Hara are chosen, and make the first voyage into the past to visit Atlantis at the time of its destruction by earthquake and flood. Here they meet two Atlantean girls, Neith and Tara, but are torn away from them when the Helkes equation of the time machine whisks them back to New York of 2500.

They go again to Byzantium in A.D. 600, and Joel meets the girl Neith in another reincarnation which Professor Modesta eagerly hails as possible proof that souls are immortal and live to eternity in new bodies.

He is anxious to send Joel and Tex on a new voyage into time, and they are eager to go, as their huge size makes them freaks in New York, and they wish again to find Neith and Tara. So they now prepare for a new adventure into the past. . . .

CHAPER I

THEN I HEARD NOTHING

ORDINARILY Professor Anthony Modesta's laboratory was as silent as a tomb. It was located on the

one hundred and eighty-sixth floor of the Solar Building, sixteen hundred feet above the clamor of New York, A.D. 2500. He and his staff never talked because they could exchange thoughts by telepathy. Thus, in a cloak of hollow silence, his tremendous experiments progressed.

But today the laboratory echoed with sound and voices. A terrific argument was raging, the words being spoken because Tex O'Hara and I were throwbacks to the era of bigger man, and hadn't the modern brain for telepathy.

Professor Modesta and his assistants, Pelham St. John and the woman, Stephanie Claire, had argued for hours. Tex and I listened intently because the point was important to us; so vital that a wrong answer might cost us our lives.

For the twentieth time Professor Modesta roared, "I tell you, St. John, man—the true man and not an apish forebear—has existed on earth fewer than seventy thousand years."

St. John replied patiently, "You would find men, sir, no different from the Indians and savages of recorded history. To find the *beginning* of man you will have to send Quaite and O'Hara back *three million years.*

(While paleontologists are now in general agreement that the earth is about 1,500,000,000 years old, a tremendous controversy rages as to the first appearance of true men, those who used tools, made pictures, and left their records and parts of their skeletons imbedded in rock. The age of the earth is measured by two facts: radium energy, dissipating, leaves a residue of lead, and radium emanations can be measured precisely—which is why the age of the earth is no longer at issue.

Age is also measured by rock strata—primary, tertiary, etc.—and the kind of rock in which early man's evidence is found is the means of establishing his time on earth. That still varies from 70,000 years to 4,000,000 years because of disagreement as to the age of the rock itself.)

Tex looked at me uneasily. "Boy," he muttered, "they throw years around like pennies."

I was uneasy myself. In preparation for this tremendous expedition, I had studied and read exhaustively the literature about primitive man. I knew the dreadful danger if they made a mistake in time.

Suppose Modesta guessed wrong, and we went back beyond mankind and *were the only two human beings in creation.* Suppose we happened to arrive in a glacial period when the earth almost to the equator was covered with a sheet of solid ice. Suppose we happened to be re-atomized in a hot period when the highest living creature was a reptile like the dinosaur, and there was no edible food for such as Tex and I. We would die miserably.

The time machine could take us there; but it could not keep us alive. By Helkes' equation it would inexorably bring us back—even as decomposing corpses. . . . So I listened anxiously, trying to make up my own mind.

IMPATIENTLY Professor Modesta strode to the wall. Here he had a chart made in the form of a huge clock-face, numbered to twelve. "If we take the time, one billion, two hundred million years, as the period when the earth and the moon were thrown off as a hot mass by the sun," he said, "each hour on the chart represents two hundred million years in the earth's history."

Tex looked at me bewilderedly. I shrugged.

"On that basis," continued Professor Modesta, "it took four hours, or eight hundred million years, to produce the first creature with a backbone. It took another two hundred million years to produce a living thing that could exist out of the water on land—a creature with lungs. On such a chart the period of man's history when he could write and keep records existed only one-fifth of a second. Which means that, setting the time machine on *earth's* age, Joel and Tex go back only three seconds."

"I still contend, from the best scientific sources, sir, that you must send them back one full minute, or three million three hundred and twenty thousand years," said St. John.

He turned to the girl (a freak like Tex and me, for she was five feet, seven inches tall). "Don't you think so, Stephanie?"

I saw her eyes through the lens of the durolo mask which, with a suit of the same material, they all wore to protect themselves against the atomic force of the time machine. Her gaze was fixed on me, and I thought I saw fear there.

"Man could exist only in the proper environment," she said in a low lovely voice. "The nearest agreement among scientists is that the fourth glacial period ended seventy thousands years ago. That coincides roughly with the appearance of the Cro-magnon, or true man, and the vanishment of the Neanderthal or ape man."

Modesta looked his approval. Not so St. John. He frowned despite the fact that he was in love with her.

"Why risk the lives of Joel and Tex on such a dangerous uncertainty?" she asked. "It will be perilous enough as it is. Try seventy thousand years as the first experiment. If it is not far enough into time, you can send them again—a hundred, two hundred thousand years, based on the evidence they bring back."

"A waste of valuable time," sneered St. John.

"No," cried Stephanie. "You *must* select a time when these two young men can exist and *return.* If you lose their lives by casting too far on a guess, then man's origin remains a mystery until the end of the universe."

This was sense and Tex and I nodded eagerly. I had a strong attachment to Stephanie Claire. She didn't look upon us as cogs in a scientific mechanism to solve the earth's mysteries; she saw us as human beings.

"Why not the end of the first ice age of a million years ago?" asked St. John. "There was warmth then to support mammal life."

"No," said Modesta suddenly, "Stephanie is right. We must approach this gradually. There will be risk and danger enough as it is, for the earth was still in a state of convulsion seventy thousand years ago. Volcanoes and earthquakes occurred; perhaps even dinosaurs still existed. How do we *know?*"

He turned to me. "Joel, will you and Tex risk seventy thousand years B.C.?"

"More readily than a million," I replied, "because I want to prove the reincarnation theory. If there were true men on the earth, I will find Neith and Tex will find Tara."

MODESTA dismissed this personal desire. "Good!" he exclaimed. "The notebook, Joel. Write down these questions I must have answered. Some theorists say all varieties of man—white, yellow, brown and black—are descended from a common ancestor, the Neolithic man. Others believe there were four off-shoots of the

ape man, each producing a race. I want the true answer."

(The earth's history is divided into periods going back to Azoic (no life at all) time of a billion years ago. Man's time on earth is placed in the Paleolithic, or early stone age, but real man, "the Cro-magnon man," is placed in the Neolithic or "new stone age." Each age lasted for thousands of years.)

He was growing greatly excited now, as he always did when the solution of an historical mystery seemed about to be revealed.

"Did original man talk? What was his speech? Did he sing? Did he laugh? Did he reason? Or were these gradual acquirements over tens of thousands of years? What happened to the Neanderthal type of man? The Java man? The Heidelberg man? And finally—" he stuttered in his eagerness—"the Pithecanthropus Erectus—the true ape man?"

Homo Neanderthalensis, the origin of true man at the time (it is believed) of the Fourth Ice Age, 70,000 years ago. The remnant of the skull found indicates that Neanderthal man had a brain pan only slightly smaller than present man's and in the grave were implements of stone.
Pithecanthropus Erectus means "ape-man who walks." The reconstruction of skeleton fragments is theoretical but this creature was neither full man nor true ape and is sometimes called the "missing link."

He strode across the room. "This time take a cinema camera—one of the two-millimeter recorders. I want a living record, Joel, because no one knows anything of this tremendous period; you may revolutionize all accepted opinions."

His excitement infected me, and as Tex and I were to go immediately, I hurriedly made ready the things we must take.

Tex and I each took a Colt automatic pistol from the New York museum and twenty rounds of cartridges, large Bowie knives, flint and steel for making fires.

"It is conceivable," said Modesta, "that you will find men who have never discovered fire."

He handed me the usual sextant and charts for locating myself when we came to.

LATE in the afternoon we were ready. We stood, Tex and I, at the huge sun windows looking out at the vast monoliths of New York. An air ferry, for London by her color, was just leaving the air-base that was once New York harbor. Once in the stratosphere she would make six hundred to seven hundred miles an hour, reaching London in five hours.

But her speed was nothing to ours when we stepped into that oxydyl-durolo box with its thick doors like an old-fashioned refrigerator.

As Modesta shook my hand he visibly trembled. "You are to examine a mystery known only to God," he said. "Bring me the truth."

St. John shook hands, muttered, "Good luck."

Stephanie Claire, her eyes anxious, said, "There will be great peril. Take no unnecessary chances—and come back to us."

Tex and I looked at each other and forced a grin. I stepped into the box and he followed.

The moment the door closed and the atomic force of forty billion degrees of sun heat disintegrated us, we would be gone for thirty-one days, four hours, eight minutes and twenty-six seconds. Nothing could bring us back before that time expired. Nothing could hold us where we were when it had elapsed.

The door closed. We were in utter darkness, and again was that awful moment of waiting. What would we find? What dangers would assail us in this remote period when the world was young? Were we going to pre-historic man? Would I find Neith?

I felt Tex's hand come out and grip my arm. "As usual, I'm scared as hell," he said.

"Me, too," I said, "but it will be all right."

Suddenly I felt the terrific blast of superhuman heat, the disintegration of my body. I heard Tex cry out. Then I heard nothing at all.

CHAPTER II

SOMEWHERE MUST BE MAN

THERE was an insufferable heat that seemed to choke me. I opened my eyes. Around me swarmed a myriad of insects. From nearby came the cheerful sound of running water. I sat up and wiped my streaming face. For a moment I was bewildered—lost.

Then I heard Tex say, "Judas, but it's hot!"

I turned. He was examining himself, sweat pouring from his face, and as I looked at him his eyes had the blank expression that we always had when we came out of nothing to exist once more. Memory made me suddenly jump. Our trip to pre-historic time—had we made it?

"All right, Tex?" I asked.

"Sure. Swell." He remembered now. "Joel, where—where are we?"

"Just what I was wondering."

I looked around. We were on the green mould of a small clearing near the edge of a stream. Around us, towering beyond the edge of my sight, were enormous trees: trees over a hundred and fifty feet high, covered with green fungus. Around their huge trunks twisted an endless number of vines that curled upward out of sight. In between them was matted, thick, twisted brush like a barrier so impassable that a man might take half a day to cut into it a hundred yards.

"Boy!" said Tex, "it don't look like anything—" He broke off sharply. "Look, Joel. What's that?"

I turned sharply as he pointed. I was in time to see a hairy creature clear the smallish stream in a single bound. It vanished immediately into the rank growth. I gasped at the instant of vision. The head, the arms, the legs.

"Good Lord!" muttered Tex, "it looked like a *man!*"

My heart pounded, but I shook my head. "The hair, Tex. It must have been an ape—too big for a man anyway."

Tex nodded. "Maybe." He gave me a straight stare. "Joel, suppose we've come back too far?"

That fear oppressed me, too. I jumped up. "We've got to find out where we are in latitude and longitude," I said. "I'm going to shin up one of those trees until I can see the sun and take a sight."

I picked out a huge tree, its trunk thirty feet thick. The tough creepers that wound round it made climbing comparatively simple. Suddenly, as we were half-way up, the air screamed with screeching and bawling. Tex yelled

and nearly fell. Around us the tree was alive with flying animals.

"For cat's sake!" shouted Tex.

I started to laugh. "Monkeys!" I said. "We came right on a city of them."

As they scurried, swinging through the dense foliage with tremendous agility, I studied them eagerly for a clue: they might be anthropoid. But to my untrained eye they seemed plain monkeys. From safe perches their wizened faces peered out as we climbed upward, their tiny eyes watching our every move, their jaws chattering protest.

"Maybe," I said, "we're just somewhere in the tropics where there are still monkeys."

Wet and greasy with sweat, we panted a hundred and fifty feet into the air. Here, swaying precariously on a slender limb, I could see over the forest.

"Golly!" cried Tex, awed, "it's nothing but woods for miles and miles and miles."

My own heart sank. As far as my eye could see were only treetops bending in the hot wind. On the horizon to the northwest were purple shadows, but whether they were mountains or clouds I could not tell. I turned to the south. Nothing broke the horizon and in between was only waving green. I looked up. Through a moist heat haze I saw the sun. It had tipped past the zenith—I roughly calculated two o'clock.

WHILE Tex held our skin charts, I got out a book of logarithms, took the sextant and pulled the sun down to the artificial horizon. Swiftly I calculated; then whistled in amazement and muttered, "It can't be."

"What can't be?" Tex leaned closer to look.

"Where we are," I muttered, and re-checked my figures. They came to fifty degrees and two minutes north, and two degrees and ten seconds west, mean Greenwich.

Tex whistled. "If you're right, Joel, we should be standing in a couple hundred feet of water."

"I am right," I said grimly. "Right now, Tex, we're sitting in the middle of the English Channel, due south of Portland Bill and not sixty miles from Plymouth, England."

Tex thought hard. "What's it mean?"

"Well"—I shrugged—"geographers say that thousands of years ago England was connected to the European mainland, as was Australia with Asia and the American continent with Africa. They say that the melting ice-age inundated and made islands and continents."

"Does that mean we're really back seventy thousand years?"

"I can't say for sure." I started to climb down. "We've got to see some living things—something human."

Tex followed me down.

"I hope we do find them," he muttered. "It will be plenty lonesome spending thirty days here with *nothing*."

"That's England to the northwest," I said. "Maybe those *were* mountains instead of clouds. Anyway, we'll walk that way."

"Not through this forest, we won't walk anywhere but down that stream," said Tex. "A bird would bat its brains out trying to get through this undergrowth."

"We've got to get out of the forest to find men," I muttered.

"Maybe it's all forest," said Tex quietly, "like Modesta said about forests making coal. Maybe the closest human is that thing we saw jump the creek."

I shivered. My mind refused—was incapable of grasping—the picture of earth without human beings.

We were within twenty feet or so of the ground when it happened. Without warning, from the left came such a hoarse screech of agony as made my skin creep.

Tex muttered, "Oh, Lord!"

I looked in the direction of the horrible cry. I saw what seeemd to be a foot-thick tree trunk—except that *it was moving*. And at the end of the tree trunk was a huge, arrow-shaped head. In the head—his shoulders, one arm and his head protruding from the jaws—was a man.

A MAN? It had the shoulders and arms of a man though they were covered with a thick black hair. But the face was like that of no human. There was no forehead; the nose was flat to the face. The gaping mouth had teeth like an animal's. Its hands pounded at the gigantic snake's face.

But the snake heaved its mammoth head, gave a sort of sucking sound; and the man—if man it was—vanished into the horrible pink mouth. The snake made another such sound. And then we could see, in the bulging skin of the throat, the vague shape of the man moving slowly.

I was frozen with horror.

"That man or thing," said Tex hoarsely, "was layin' in wait for us, and the snake swung a loop—" His voice rose to a croaking yell.

I felt a bump. A gray-green coil, cool and smooth, slid off me. It looped around Tex's body, pinning his arms to his sides, sweeping him off his perch on the limb. Into my view came one of those arrow-shaped heads, a gaping pink mouth two feet wide. It was swooping towards Tex's head. I caught one fleeting glimpse of Tex's gray, agonized face.

There was no time to think. No time consciously to act. I suddenly saw my hand out, the gun in it, and my hand jerking to the kick of the heavy gun. I can't remember hearing the explosions.

I only knew that that huge horrible head began to disintegrate as the heavy bullets struck it. I must have fired three times because both bulging glassy eyes vanished. The roof of the snake's skull lifted.

It was dead. I knew it.

I yelled, "Quick, Tex, jerk loose."

Tex hung there white and helpless. But he was conscious. His eyes were turned to the right. I saw that the single loop of the snake's enormous body still squeezed him tightly—and was getting tighter as the coil contracted.

Then I understood and groaned. The snake was dead, true; but much of its nervous system reposed in its backbone. And the fact that it was dead did not prevent it from continuing to crush its prey to death. So long as its tail was wound around the adjacent smallish tree it had a fulcrum to exercise its power.

And I could not reach that tree to use my knife.

A HOARSE, horrible groan burst from Tex. I could almost hear his ribs contracting to the breaking point. In desperation I did the only thing I could think of; I leveled the gun, took careful aim and threw the remaining four bullets in the magazine into the snake's tail just where it started to go around the tree in the first loop.

Then with fingers that fumbled in my haste, I started to reload. I sobbed in fury and fear. I would shoot that

damned snake in two. But I knew I might be too late.

Suddenly Tex called weakly, "Joel! Joel!"

I looked up from the loading operation. Thank heaven, my bullets or something had caused the constriction to relax. Tex was sliding through the loop of the snake's body, now in peril of falling to his death on the ground below. I dropped gun, bullets and magazine and seized him. His hands clasped weakly around my neck as I wrapped my legs around the tree limb and held him.

"I guess—I guess I'm about—tuckered out," he whispered and collapsed.

Somehow—I'll never know the details—I got him to the ground and laid him out. The snake's mate—the one that had swallowed the half-man—had vanished.

I was alone, I had no medicines, and there was no way of knowing if Tex was fatally smashed inside. I ran for water. I bathed him and he breathed. I massaged him, saw the purplish splotches on his body slowly disappear. Inside, I was in a chaos. I could do no more. Yet he must live; he had to.

Hours that seemed centuries passed. The greenish gloom of the forest grew black with the coming of night. Night in the forest with a helpless man. Night in a forest where man was the prey of gigantic reptiles.

"Tex," I muttered, "snap out of it, fellow." I spoke again and again; and I could scarcely see his white face when suddenly I heard him answering.

"Joel," he whispered, "you'd better pick up that gun and magazine and cartridges while you still can see."

I cried out, then: "Tex, what's broken?"

He slowly moved his fingers and arms, toes and legs. He took a deeper breath and winced. "I'm all right," he said. "Get that gun. I'm weak but I can walk to keep from spending a night here."

I recovered my gun, reloaded it and half-carried Tex to the creek. I got out my flashlight.

"We'll go on," I said. "We'll get out of this place. Somewhere there *must* be men."

And we splashed downstream in the water.

CHAPTER III

AND THEY KNOW FIRE

WE SLEPT that night on the creek bank in a clearing and I watched a huge fire. Tex slept exhausted. It was a night I shall never forget. We had slogged through the water until Tex faltered and could go no more. Around us were noises and fiery eyes; Lord knows what they were.

And after the fire was burning brightly and Tex lay still, they grew bolder. Some even came into the crimson light, slinking things slavering for food. One I saw plainly—and it gave me a shock.

Driven by hunger perhaps, or else bolder than the others, this one, a tawny animal that looked like a tiger, came within twenty feet. It was bigger than any tiger I have ever seen, or lion either. And when it opened its mouth to give vent to a mewing cry, I saw two down-pointing tusks nearly a foot long, as thin and as deadly as daggers.

Its cry roused Tex from his exhausted slumber. "Good grief," he whispered, "what's that?" He groped feebly for his gun.

"The saber-toothed cat!" I said. "I know because once my father took me to California where they have pitch pits out of which they took skeletons with such tusks."

"How long ago did *it* live?" Tex asked. "If we knew, we'd—"

"Nobody rightly knew. The scientists say from fifty thousand to a million years ago." I spoke roughly. "Sleep. It's a long trek tomorrow."

Tex sank back and presently was asleep again. Out there in the darkness the night was full of terror. Growls, animal screams, the swift savage thud of the kill. I heard one deep roar that made the very ground shake.

Yet despite this I grew sleepy. I finally sharpened a stick and braced it in the ground against my neck. So, somehow, the endless night passed, and the steaming gray dawn spread over the endless forest. There was nothing for food, and when Tex wakened and said he felt better, we pushed on downstream. The water must lead to bigger waters. Somewhere there must be an end to the forest.

There were fish in the stream, many of them, and big; and I wondered bitterly why I had not thought to bring such simple things as a few hooks and a hank of fishline.

About noon Tex sat down to rest. "We ought to eat," he said. "I could start on a coyote tail first."

"There are monkeys up in those trees," I suggested.

He grinned feebly. "I could eat buzzard quicker."

I felt the same; eating monkey seemed too much like cannibalism. We might be driven to it but now we tightened our belts and pushed on. The heat grew all but insufferable. It was like the hot breath of an oven in your throat. The insects made raw hash of our faces and hands.

THREE hours later we came upon the first break in the terrible forest: a huge clearing filled with black stumps and waist-high herbage. A fire—probably started by lightning—had burned over three or four square miles.

The stream had widened out considerably and here it was broad and sluggish like a huge pond. On the edge I saw movement.

"Ducks!" I muttered. "Joel, get a fire going. We eat."

I drew my gun, threw the safety and crept silently forward. They were like no species of duck I had ever heard of, and they were as big as geese, but they were diving, swimming, feeding; and seeing them, I had a clear pang of hunger that made my mouth water. I crept close for a sure shot because a .45 bullet isn't the right kind for fowl.

As I was within forty feet or so, the thicket along the edge of the water burst asunder with a crash. A bounding figure hurtled out.

In his hand the figure had two big stones which he threw with startling accuracy. Two of the ducks, just about to lift, were hit and flopped back with a splash. The hairy giant never stopped his forward rush. He plunged into the water, seized the half-stunned fowl in tremendous hands, wrung their necks—all in one smooth flow of unleashed power. Then his voice rose in a hoarse, cracked cry. He turned back through the thicket and smashed open a passage to a clearing.

I heard a small sound beside me. Tex was peering at the hairy beings—female, infant and youth—toward whom the hairy thing was going.

"The same kind of gent that the snake swallowed," whispered Tex, "and it ain't human."

Certainly the hairy black figure, bent forward so that the hands hung below the knees, did not seem human. Nor was there much of the human in his shambling walk.

Yet from where I stood I could see his imprints in the mud bank of the stream. They were human footprints. No offset big toe, and there was a perfect arch indicated.

"Sub-human," I whispered. "We're on earth before real man." I swore softly. Here was an end of all the fine dreams of talking to the first man and getting his tale from his own lips, because these hairy creatures could not talk.

"Get the camera out," I said to Tex. "This is the Neanderthal type of human- what was later called a Grimaldi. And we'd better have the record."

The women and children were moving about, overturning stones, popping insects and grubs into their mouths. The leader, the killer of the ducks, had torn one to pieces and was eating it, raw and bloody, bones and all. Three younger creatures had fallen on the other and growled and yelled as they fought for pieces. I estimated that they would be about seven feet tall, standing erect.

Cautiously Tex and I moved to the thicket to get a better picture. Suddenly I plunged a foot in a pot-hole, lost my balance and recovered it only by a tremendous splashing about.

"Look!" cried Tex. "They heard."

They had all turned. The killer of the ducks had seized a huge stone in his ham-like fist. His flat nose quivered. His eyes under the shaggy mass of hair glittered dangerously. He was looking our way; and he was very, very dangerous.

"We'll go out and make friends," I said. "Maybe we can find out something."

We advanced boldly into the clearing.

AT SIGHT of us such a screaming and moaning bedlam went up as hurt the ears. The naked females, clutching children, ran. But the huge male leader roared in fear and hurled the stone. The throw had marvelous accuracy If I had not dropped flat it would have crushed in my chest.

Then the ape-man roared, pounded his chest; but he slowly backed in the direction his family had fled. Some of these had reached the first trees. They were swinging with incredible skill and rapidity by limb and liana up from the ground.

"They must never have seen anybody like us, to be so scared." Tex was busy exposing film.

"No," I said, puzzled, "it isn't that. That was a *familiar* fear. They *know* what they're afraid of—but why?"

Tex never had a chance to answer that question.

I have said that the new underbrush, in most places, was waist high. Now, without warning, it swirled and waved. I saw black streaming hair, brown faces, arms upraised holding shafts of wood with pointed stones tied to the end with thong.

"Tex," I cried. "Look! Those are *men*. Look at their faces, their bodies."

Tex did not reply, intent on the terrible scene being enacted before our eyes.

Most of the brown men had raced in pursuit of the fleeing family. Two came at the huge ape-man who had turned at bay. He had seized two more stones. He threw them with lightning speed but the brown men dodged After that he never had a chance.

Within twenty feet the two brown men stopped, threw their spears with terrific strength. The stone points must have been amazingly sharp. One struck the ape-man in the stomach and the point pierced his back. He howled in pain and wrath and terror. His hands broke off the shaft. He started to run toward them. They drew back from his shambling approach, screaming in triumph.

"Good Lord!" I cried, nauseated. "It's man hunting man."

On the ape-man went, another three paces. Then slowly he sat down, holding his stomach with his two hands. A sad, bewildered expression twisted his ugly face. He whimpered, a puzzled sound. Slowly he rolled over on his side. He tried twice to get up. I would have gone forward to him then, but it was too late. One of the brown men circled, raced in and with a stone tied to a stick, bashed in the ape-man's skull with one blow.

"That," said Tex thickly, "makes me want to start throwing lead."

The others of the brown men were coming back. One held a struggling child of seven or so.

I said, "Let's stop this slaughter," and walked ahead toward the spot where the ape-man had died. I called, "Can you speak? Do you understand me?"

The answer was immediate and deadly. They gathered in a line with flying legs that covered the ground with incredible speed. With axe and spear they raced toward us. Their faces blazed with the lust to kill.

IN THAT instant, curiously enough, I was aware of the beauty and symmetry of their magnificent lithe bodies. Not tall, perhaps, but muscled and molded like a Praxiteles sculpturing. But Tex and I didn't pause to admire. We had both drawn our guns.

"The legs," I said, and picked out the leader and fired. The gun betrayed me. It jumped; and as the brown man came hurtling through the air his body seemed to stop, hang there against the sky as the bullet whacked into his chest. He fell with a thump.

Tex's gun roared. The second man screamed in pain, and the blood spurted from his thigh. Tex shot where he looked.

The effect was amazing. The rest stopped, stared. A bursting cry of terror echoed in the clearing. Then they turned and ran. I swear to you that before you could count three the clearing seemed empty. They were in the brush, of course, but it would have taken better eyes than Tex's or mine to tell where.

The one had dropped the child and he now scuttled like a wild animal for the woods into which his people had escaped.

Tex let go a long breath.

"By cripes, Joel, it seems to be kill or get killed everywhere."

"You were looking," I said gloomily, "at a band of cannibals getting the materials for a feast."

"Yeah." He nodded. "I couldn't figure any other reason for pouncing on those poor ape people." He paused. Then: "Joel, are these the best men on earth—these we just saw at their dirty work?"

"I don't know," I said. "It looks like it." In sudden nausea I swung to the widened stream. "Let's keep going. Let's get out of this cursed forest."

. . . At dusk I killed three ducks, we made a fire and had our first meal in pre-historic time.

It was when I had fixed the fire for the first watch that the two spears hissed past me. It was all that was needed to make me boil.

Tex had sat up. We both realized that the fire was a protection against animals but made us perfect targets for the brown men lurking out there.

"I'LL FIX this," I muttered. "The next spears that come, scream, Tex, and roll flat, just beyond the fire line. As long as men are there, animals won't be." He nodded, guessing my plan.

The spears—three this time—lashed into the firelight. I yelled, plunged and rolled, as did Tex. We lay absolutely motionless, guns drawn and cocked. We didn't have long to wait.

Presently two shadowy forms crept across the glade. I had time to puzzle over the skill with which they hugged the outside edge of the firelight. They had not used fire themselves—but they were *aware* of it.

They eased closer, those mallet-headed axes upraised. Then they made the sudden dash.

"Now, Tex," I yelled, and sprang up.

The man swung his axe, missed and turned to run. I smashed the heavy automatic against his skull and he dropped in his tracks. I leaped on him, wrenched his hands behind him. There were plenty of thin, wiry creepers, and with these I bound him. Tex had knocked out his man and was giving him the same treatment.

I called clearly, "Try to attack us again and these two will pay."

Whether the words were understood I don't know. But the texture of my voice should have explained much. And it did put an end to the spear-casting. Tex and I managed short catnaps through the night; and an interminable night it was.

With dawn our captives were conscious, watching us with glittering, unblinking eyes. Around us the forest seemed empty.

I said to one, "Can you speak? Where are you from?"

I waited. Tex grunted. "They're only partly human, Joel."

Suddenly one of them licked his lips. "You white fire-makers," he said.

His words made me jump to my feet. In my excitement I never thought to wonder at this fantastic thing: that *he understood me and I understood his words.*

"Tex!" I half-yelled. "There is *another* race of man. A white race. And they know fire."

CHAPTER IV

THE WHITE QUARRY

WE WENT downstream, splashing and hurrying, buoyed up by a hope and eagerness we had not known before. We took our two prisoners with us. They had only a limited vocabulary, consisting chiefly of words associated with things and existence. Like hunt, kill, eat, foe, sleep.

Yet by using signs and gestures I learned an amazing lot to record in my notebook for Professor Modesta. By studying their axes and bodies along with what was said, I knew now that this was the Neolithic man of the south—the so-called Mediterranean man.

(General belief is that the Neolithic or true man sprang from what is now the Mediterranean basin. However, if this be so, he spread rapidly to all parts of the earth, for axes, spearheads, scraping stones and other of his tools have been found literally, all over the world: from Mongolia to Abyssinia, from America to Australia. Though found so separated, each tool is so identical it speaks of a general Neolithic creature—of one kind of man, not yet black, white or yellow.)

What history our two prisoners had was preserved in song. The vocabulary enlarged when they chanted. I learned that they had come from the south. They had known fire but had lost the secret. They had lived up here once but the "rain that turned to stone" (snow, I suppose) drove them away. And then when it grew warm again they had returned.

The white fire-makers lived to the north, not far from the "river you can't see across" on the slope of Thunder-God. They lived there, what few were left, because the Neolithic men dared not attack them there. My informant—his name was Fodil—spoke of the first battles when the more numerous brown men decimated the whites they found, stole their women and slew their children.

But he did not know where the white fire-makers had come from; nor why they were white. He had eaten them, and they were now very few, and their flesh was a delicacy only used for the annual feast.

So the white fire-makers who, I was now certain, were our own forebears, remained a mystery. But Fodil knew the way there—the smoking Thunder-God would guide us, he said—and we splashed downstream toward what would be the French coast at Cape Gris-Nez.

Much else I learned which, though not of the white fire-makers, was vastly illuminating about prehistoric man. About cannibalism, for instance.

I asked Fodil why he devoured human flesh.

He looked bewildered but finally sang the song of the feast, and this betrayed the clue: the huge mammals—mastodon, elephant, tiger, saber-toothed cat—stalked human kind. The small horse, deer and the like were too fleet in escape. The Neolithic man for long subsisted on grubs and insects, fish and smaller game that could be surprised and trapped. When these failed and hunger drove, the strong ate the weak.

This was long ago and now Neolithic man no longer ate his own kind; but he did eat Grimaldis or Neanderthal creatures because he did not consider them human.

(Research has shown that the Neolithic man never inter-bred with the Grimaldis—though it was possible to do so—and the belief is the Neolithic man exterminated the age-man and probably ate him at feasts.)

At feast times he tried to eat a white fire-maker for luck and strength and courage; and in the spring he tried to steal a white fire-maker's woman because they were luscious, and knew more than the brown women.

WE HAD reached, by now, a huge estuary that led to the sea. There was tidel refuse so it could not be far. And here, where the forest and the sea had fought, the forest had lost. We could turn north now toward the smoking volcano on the horizon—which was England.

Here there were trees and woods only at intervals. Here was life of the marsh and prairie type. Here game was plentiful and we ate well.

To my surprise Fodil, though he and his kind had lost the secret of fire, had memory of cooked food. Occasionally the Thunder-God volcano erupted and started forest

fires, or lightning ignited the thick jungle. After the fire had burned itself out, they hastened to find animals thus burned to death. The flesh, he said, was delicious like this for a time.

"Then black—no good," he concluded.

So we headed northwest, guided by the smoking plume of the volcano. Late one afternoon, as we came to a rather broad river which we must cross, I heard a thunderous shout to the right, beyond a clump of trees. I hastened to the water's edge to see what had happened.

For an instant I froze, gasped, stunned to immobility by what I saw.

The Neolithic brown men had followed us on the long journey. Silent, stalking like saber-toothed cats, they had watched our every move. What they had planned I did not know because now, coming upon other quarry, they had burst from concealment for the kill. Spears raised, they had formed a big circle and were advancing a step at a time upon another man, penned in the circle.

A white man!

HIS skin was tanned from exposure to the sun, but he wore clothes of treated skins. Where there were rents in these, his body was as buff-colered as mine. This I grasped as I noticed his sun-yellowed hair, his youth, his magnificent stature of six feet and more. He was brawny, great ropes of muscles rippling under his skin. His blue eyes flashed like fire. He shouted again his defiance, his voice like a bellowing bull's.

He had a spear, but this was not upraised. Instead he had a leathern pouch in his right hand into which he had slipped a stone about as big as my fist. Even as my first paralysis passed, he suddenly raised his hand. The pouch, I saw then, was a sling. The stone sped with flashing speed. One of the brown man attackers tried to dodge, but the stone was on him like a bullet.

It crashed into his chest with a sickening thud and rending of crushed bone. He choked and fell.

The young white man yelled in triumph. He fitted another stone to the sling. The brown men suddenly yelled, increased their speed of advance. Two spears roared through the air. They both missed the white by a narrow margin.

Despite his sling he was doomed and I knew it.

"Tex!" I yelled, drawing my gun. "Hurry—*a white man!*"

With that I burst into a run. I fired even at that long range, hoping to scare off the brown men. Ordinarily that should have worked. But Fodil had said a white fire-maker was a rare delicacy, bringing luck and courage, and these brown men wanted him. They merely increased the speed of the closing circle and it was the white who was startled and amazed at the roaring concussion of the gun.

The new leader screamed and raised his spear. I never hesitated but shot for his body. At the explosion he went backward at the impact and knocked down a companion. The back of the circle turned. I raced at them, firing once again over their heads. Another gun cracked. It was Tex; and again his amazing marksmanship dropped one of the brown men with a wounded leg.

They broke now and ran. As I pushed forward the white man yelled in fright and defiance and made ready to launch a stone at me from his sling.

Promptly I dropped my gun, raised my hands. "Friend," I said. "Look—we are friends. White men."

I tore open my shirt and exposed my skin. Where the sun had not reached it was white. He saw and his amazed fear changed to puzzlement. His own right hand flew out.

"I am Mal," he cried. "But I do not know you."

"Jeepers!" muttered Tex in amazement, "that guy looks enough like you to be your brother, Joel."

CHAPTER V

THE BURNING MOUNTAIN

I SCARCELY heard Tex. I was still marveling at a phenomenon which seemed fantastic, impossible: I understood Mal and he understood me . . . Before this I have puzzled over the queer fact that no matter what era of time Tex and I visited, we always knew the speech and could make the people understand us. At first I put it down to the fact that telepathically I *knew* what was said rather than hearing it. But this did not explain Mal's understanding of my speech.

Since Mal was one of the first true men on earth, I can only believe that the speech of all men in the beginning was alike and racial memory of it exists through all ages.

(Scientists now believe that all men sprang from one stem, the Neolithic, and all speech had the same roots.)

Understand me: Mal did not know *all* I said. As I was to discover later, his speech was confined to naming simple objects and facts. He knew *concrete* things, and merely appeared puzzled when abstract ideas were brought up. The art of thinking philosophically, of discussing good and bad and moral ideas, was beyond him.

But he recognized us as friends—knew us for his own kind.

I told him we were going to the white fire-makers. He pounded his chest. "I go, too," he said. "You come with me."

This time as we headed toward the smoking volcano, the Neolithic men did not pursue. Almost at once, however, I learned that danger lay ahead. It came out in a chance remark of Mal's later in the day.

"I return to die," he said during a rest, "but you will see a fine battle."

"To die?" I repeated. "Why?"

"The Old One will kill me," he said simply. "I must fight him; and Letou, the fire-priest, will help him. It is always the Old One who wins. But I do not care."

(The "Old One," or "Old Man" became head of a tribe at first because he was the strongest and then because he was more cunning, had a better memory, could protect the tribe against its many dangers. All women were his, and when youth rose he killed them and drove them away. When he became old and feeble and the spear of power fell from his hand, the most daring man picked it up—and in turn became "the Old One.")

He stood facing the sun, his magnificent body gilded by its rays. His head was flung back, his brawny arms crossed on his chest. He gazed straight ahead, calm, unafraid.

"It is better to die than be alone," he said.

Presently we resumed the journey and Tex and I pressed him with questions. And bit by bit we learned the tremendous saga of his life, of his people.

Mal had invented the sling shot. This power to strike an enemy or game a death blow beyond the reach of a spear aroused the jealousy of the Old One and of the fire-priest, Letou. Chiefly because it made Mal the best hunter, and drew the admiration of the younger men.

Furthermore, Mal, who had once straddled a log and floated on water (feared and loathed by man as a dangerous enemy) was always dreaming of making a log with a place to sit in it, so he could go on the water. This was nonsense, dangerous, radical. This was flouting the gods that lived in all things. It would bring bad luck to the tribe. He must stop it—or fight the Old One.

NO YOUTH wished to fight the Old One because this was sure death. The fight always took place at dusk, and always the fire-priest came to protect the Old One and the reckless youth died miserably. So Mal ceased work on the hollow log. Gradually matters settled down once more.

But then Nodor the Fair liked Mal and he liked her and it was agreed between them that she should be his woman, and he would ask the fire-priest, Letou, for fire for a new hearth.

At this the Old One roared like a bull, stamped the ground until it trembled as when the Thunder-God spoke. Mal was given his choice: fight the Old One, or leave the tribe at once.

Nodor told Mal to go, since to remain meant death; and she would steal away to join him, and they would live along the great waters. Mal had gone. But Nodor did not come. He waited, and each day his heart was eaten with loneliness. He had no fire. There was no one but himself to hear his laments. Finally he could stand it no longer.

"I see Nodor once more," he finished quietly. "And then the Old One and I shall fight. I will not be afraid like the others and let him kill me easily. I will fight to the end."

But it was clear that he had not the slightest hope of defeating the Old One.

He strode tirelessly ahead. Tex and I exchanged glances. We were both thinking that human nature and human problems had not changed in seventy thousand years.

Each day, as we advanced, the volcano came closer. The forest gave way to woody patches and more vast cleared spaces. Now, because we were eager and anxious to see this white tribe and Mal was tireless, we pushed on after dark. The pink glow of the volcano's mouth guided us.

A new moon, thin as a sword blade, hung briefly in the western sky. We were thinking of finding a place to sleep when suddenly the night was split by a scream. Then followed moans, and shrieks, and yells, and lamentations.

Mal poised, nostrils dilated, sniffing.

"Not brown men," he said. "White. Like us. Come."

He was off like a flash. We were then in the woods that, while thick, were not impenetrable as in the valleys to the south.

Just ahead, bounding like a panther, Mal uttered a hoarse, vibrant cry. It was pitch dark. As Mal paused in a small glade, I pressed the button of my flashlight and a beam of radiance shot across a scene that so shocked me that I stood rooted to the spot.

Tex muttered, "Oh, my Lord!"

IN THE beam of the light I saw a huddle of white men, women, and children. They were in the form of a circle. In the center was a huge, bearded man. Around him pressed other men, bigger and stronger than the next ring behind them. Then came children of twelve or so who were surrounded by women. The very outside ring was composed of the weakest of all: crippled children, crippled men and a few old women.

They huddled like sheep when the wolf prowls. And in the light of my torch we saw a pair of fiery eyes retreating: a saber-toothed cat just slinking off.

In his mouth he had the body of an eight-year-old boy. The boy was alive; the long dagger tusks of the cat had sunk into his flesh at the hips. But he no longer struggled, nor cried out, but lay there with his two hands feebly beating the air.

Tex rushed forward in a bound. "Hold the light, Joel."

As he charged, the cat stopped—dazzled, I suppose, and amazed by the light, the first at night he had ever seen. In the darkness he seemed as big as a rhinoceros.

"Careful, Tex," I said; for as Tex sprang outward, his huge shadow falling across the saber-toothed cat, the animal had turned, poised against danger. I was afraid, too, that one terrific shake of its head would smash the child.

But Tex never paused. In the light his face was pale and tense. He leaped at the cat. The animal growled in its throat, leaped up on its haunches, its long sharp claws bared. One rip would disembowel Tex. Tex dove forward and pressed the muzzle of the gun against the animal's tawny flank.

I heard the drum of three fast explosions, saw flame flaring back from the cat's skin. It came down in a crash and sprawled its length. Tex sprang, seized those horrible knife-like tusks, and pried them out of the boy's flesh. The child fell loose into his hands.

Tex ripped his gold-beaters' skin clothing to make tourniquets for the two raw punctures.

The cat mewed once, sadly, and died. The mass of humanity crowded still closer, as frightened of us as they had been of the cat. Mal had frozen, paralyzed by supernatural terror.

"My Lord!" I muttered, "so that's why they huddle in a circle with the weak outside. The tigers and cats prey on them and it's the weak who get eaten."

Mal said tremblingly, "Then you are the spirits of the fire-god?"

"No, no," I replied, but he did not understand. Nor did the others. Tex rose.

"The kid will live," he said, "but these woods are full of big animals. We've got to have a fire."

Hastily we gathered dried wood and started a roaring fire. More screams and howls of fright greeted this. They would have run, save there was no way to flee through the ring of fiery eyes beyond the fire range. That is, all but Mal would have fled.

He cried, "You *are* fire-priests. You know the secret of fire."

IN THE center of the huddle the bearded man burst into lamentation. The gist of it was that horrible calamity had fallen upon them: their fire-tender had permitted the fire to go out. He had killed the careless one but they had no fire; so for many moons they had struggled to the fire-mountain. They had asked Letou for fire and he had refused.

Since we were supernatural beings from the sun itself, would we spare their lives and leave them the fire?

"You know," said Tex, "I'm not going to like this Letou."

I said to Mal, "Explain we are your friends. They may have the fire."

Mal nodded, courage gradually returning.

"Letou drove him from the mountain," he said, nodding to the bearded man, "and women went with him. He was not alone so he did not return."

We stayed the remainder of the night there, but we slept little. The return of fire to those who had subsisted for months on snails and bugs, grasshoppers and raw flesh of bird and rabbit, made them sing their joy.

Their songs were sagas of the long ago when the "hard rain" fell and the ice came and many perished until the Old One made fire to warm them and save the rest; the days when the giant mastodon fell to their spears and they ate of its cooked flesh.

And they sang of the peace and the plenty there was until the brown men came like a torrent from the south as the soft winds blew. The brown men who killed and drove them to the safety of the mountainside where the fire-god growled and slept.

I said to Tex, "There's the story of man. When the ice came these did not go south. They stayed and became the first white men. And when the ice passed, the brown men came north. There were so many they've practically exterminated these whites."

"Yeah," muttered Tex. "If you ask me, the way it's killed or get killed around here, it's a wonder the whites survived."

With the women feeding the fire, Tex and I dozed off along toward dawn.

WHEN I woke the sun was up and Mal, staring at me, said, "Kaal came to me during the night. He told me the Old One would kill me and not to return. But I shall not listen to Kaal." His face was deeply troubled.

"Kaal?" I repeated.

He nodded. "I saw Kaal fight the Old One and get killed. I wonder why he came to me."

I was puzzled for an instant, then I understood. Worried and excited, Mal had dreamed and in the dream he saw the image of Kaal. Since Mal did not know a dream from reality, he believed he had really seen Kaal.

It was a tremendous discovery and it excited me.

"Don't you see, Tex?" I cried. "The fact that prehistoric man didn't know a dream from reality might be the basis for the belief in immortality."

Tex looked puzzled. I tried to make it clear.

"He knows Kaal, he has seen Kaal die. Then when Mal eats too much or is troubled and dreams, he sees Kaal in his dream. He knows Kaal is dead, yet here is Kaal moving, talking. He believes Kaal's soul has returned from the spirit world."

Mal had been listening but he did not understand. He merely said, "Kaal lives in the small rocks I throw with my sling. He helps me kill. So why should he warn me away?"

I shrugged, and prepared to go. The small white family avoided us in fear. But they took good care of the fire. And when we left, women were busy with clay to make a pot in which the fire embers could be carried.

Tex, Mal and I pressed on quickly. I could scarcely contain my impatience now. And on the third day we climbed the slope of the volcano and came upon the huge sacred hearth around which lived the forebears of all the white people on earth.

Here, at last, I would plumb the secrets of mankind.

As we came into view a shout went up. Out of the caves in the cliff above the sacred hearth, men with spears poured. They stood in a grim deadly line as we crossed the last hundred yards.

(To Be Concluded Next Week)

British Lives for Egypt's Sands

Now — and in 1884

Drums of Khartoum

By E. Hoffmann Price

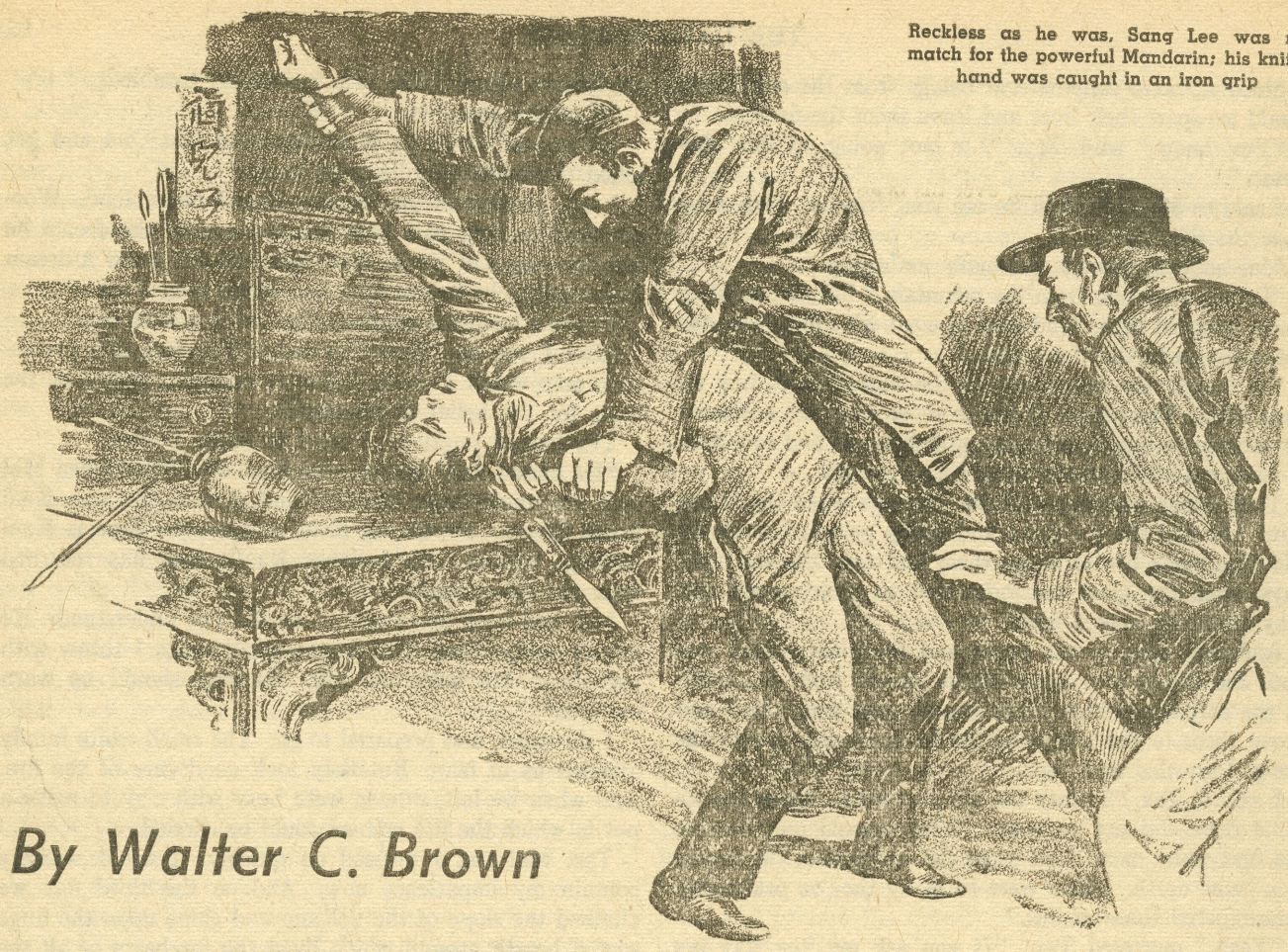
Beginning in next week's Argosy

Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (ADV.)



Reckless as he was, Sang Lee was no match for the powerful Mandarin; his knife-hand was caught in an iron grip

By Walter C. Brown

The Bamboo Sword

Author of "Black Candles", "The Dragon Blood of Mark Hao", etc.

It is written: the lion and the jackal may fight only with their teeth; but in the hands of a brave man, a flimsy weapon will prevail. And for this Sang Lee, the scrivener, may burn much joss in thankfulness

IT WAS midway to the Hour of the Fox, and a rising moon hung like a golden gong above the sharp-edged shadows of Pagoda Street, where young Sang Lee the Chinatown scrivener kept his Shop of the Painted Word.

Crouching back on his heels at the foot-high writing desk, Sang Lee carefully cleaned his collection of camel's-hair brushes and packed them away in a red porcelain jar.

Another day's work done, and not without profit, praise be to Tao. The war in the distant Dragon-Land had brought a great increase of business to Sang Lee's word-shop: long letters to be written to China relatives, memorial scrolls to honor the family dead, and an endless demand for painted paper prayers to be burned in the jade votive bowls of the Plum Blossom Joss House.

So young Sang Lee should have been a happy man, for both his rice-bowl and his cash-box were brimming over, and on a high shelf stood a blue ginger-jar which held the full marriage-price set by Loy Hong the tea merchant upon Lily, his fair daughter.

But a black cloud was rising upon Sang Lee's bright horizon: the jealous enmity of Shun Tai the Manchu, whose evil deeds were spoken of in cautious whispers. Shun Tai had chanced to set eyes upon the beauteous Lily, and this single glance had kindled in him the flame of desire.

Shun Tai had gone brazenly to Lily's father and said, "Loy Hong, you have set too low a price on your daughter's hand. Send that worthless writer-of-words about his business and I will gladly pay you double the marriage price."

"Gracious thanks, but you come too late," Loy Hong replied. "I have entered into a binding contract with Sang Lee before the Council of the Five Tongs."

"My offer stands unchanged," the Manchu declared, "and should this soft-handed slinger-of-ink be called to his ancestors before the wedding day, I will take his place before the Plum Blossom *bonze*."

"What could happen to Sang Lee?" the merchant stammered. "He is young and strong and blessed with Number One good health."

"Who can read the future?" Shun Tai asked blandly. "Who can say whether the morrow will prove friend or foe?"

"Thou wouldst not bring harm to him?" Loy Hong gasped, well knowing the true answer in advance.

"Have I made any threat against Sang Lee?" Shun Tai asked softly; then a buttery smile spread slowly over his face. "Is it not possible that he should meet with an

—*accident? Hoya!* Man is but a straw in the Wind of Destiny."

And Loy Hong the merchant trembled and was silent, but friends there were who whispered warnings to Sang Lee of the danger which hung over his head.

"It is best to seek help from the Blue Coat Men," they counseled. "The shadow of Shun Tai is black as the face of Yo Fei the Destroyer, and chill as the frozen white rain of winter."

"I do not fear Shun Tai, nor those who serve him," Sang Lee declared proudly. "Come what may, at the appointed hour I will make my claim for Lily Loy, according to the letter of the contract."

"Beware then," came the grim warning, "lest you wear a wooden robe on the day of the marriage feast!"

SANG LEE sat thinking of those bold words now, for at last he had visible evidence that the long arm of Shun Tai was reaching out toward the little word-shop of Pagoda Street. Turning out the lamp, he crossed the room with noiseless steps; and lifting a corner of the window curtain, peered down into the darkness of the street.

From an angular patch of blue-black shadow a tiny red spot winked like a little ruby eye. It came from the bowl of a bamboo pipe, and young Lee knew that behind the invisible pipe lurked the slant-eyed yellow mask of Chin Yut, who served the wicked Shun Tai as the jackal serves the tiger.

"Chin Yut has kept watch since the passing of the sun," Sang Lee muttered, and added grimly. "He is not hiding thus to write a poem about the Nine Beauties of Moonlight. *Hoya!* It is well I have put double bolts upon my door."

And having tested the soundness of those bolts, Sang Lee retired to his inner room, from whence he could look across at the lighted windows of his neighbor Loy Hong, father of the fair Lily. Sang Lee knew that Lily was waiting behind those drawn yellow shades—waiting to hear his good-night music, which was the only message he could send her since Shun Tai had entered upon the scene.

Formerly the Loy windows had stood wide open, so that young Lee could call across to Lily, and they would laugh and talk together. But now the shadow of the Manchu had placed such fear upon the tea merchant that he kept his daughter hidden away in strict *purdah.*

Sang Lee picked up his moon-fiddle, and perching himself on the window-sill, played *O dark-eyed Daughter of Delight,* which he had learned from a Shanghai man. And as young Lee played, the slim silhouette of Lily Loy appeared on the bright yellow shade, and when he had finished, the shadow of her little hand lifted in a quick gesture that was both greeting and farewell.

"Ai-yee!" Sang Lee breathed, staring sadly at the empty curtain and thinking of that day of Number One bad luck when Shun Tai had glimpsed the girl through this very window, and exclaimed loudly upon her beauty.

The eyes of Shun Tai gleamed, and his speech had been swift with excitement.

"Hai! Who is this hidden blossom of delight? By Tao's beard, a dainty lotus bud, one fit for the garden of a red-button mandarin!"

"Her name is Lily Loy, and she is my betrothed," young Lee had replied with simple dignity.

"Hoya! Then you are indeed Fortune's elder son!" Shun Tai exclaimed. "And when is the wedding day?"

"On the fifteenth day of the Moon of Falling Leaves," Lee answered.

Shun Tai nodded slowly, as if making a mental note. "Little more than half a moon distant."

"Aye," Sang Lee agreed, "but it is a mountain of hours. For the old, time is a flying arrow; for the young, a creeping turtle."

"True, but walk with care," Shun Tai said, smiling. "It has been said that a safe arrival is better than a swift journey."

Only later had Sang Lee realized that a veiled threat lay behind the soft words and deceptive smile of the Manchu—Shun Tai, whose tongue was smooth as velvet, but whose heart was hard as hammered bronze.

And now Chin Yut the jackal had wrapped himself in the cloak of night to carry out his master's secret bidding.

SANG LEE was startled by the tinkling of the glass windchime which was fastened to the outer door. Heavy footsteps mounted his private staircase, followed by a brisk rapping on the shop door.

"Who knocks?" he called out, hastily relighting his lamp.

"It is Shun Tai!" came the answer. "Open quickly, for I have urgent need of a paper-writing."

Sang Lee drew a hissing breath, his eyes darting about as if in search of a weapon; for this was a most unwelcome visitor, and the shop on the ground floor lay untenanted. Then he straightened his shoulders, moved forward and withdrew the bolts.

Tall and smiling, the Manchu stepped across the threshold, and the lamp in Sang Lee's hand threw his gigantic shadow across the ceiling; for Shun Tai stood six feet two to Lee's five feet four. A crooked cigar of blond Chinese tobacco was clamped between the Manchu's yellow teeth, and under his arm he carried a gift package wrapped in red paper dappled with gold leaf.

"It is the birthday of my friend Mark Sin, the gambler of Paradise Court," Shun Tai declared. "I have sought far and wide for a worthy gift, and it must reach him before high moon, together with a good-luck writing. It is past the hour of regular business, so I will pay a triple fee for your gracious help in this matter."

Sang Lee nodded and settling himself at the writing desk, prepared a strip of red Shantung silk, dipped his brush into a cup of gilded ink and awaited Shun Tai's words.

"To the Honorable Mark Sin, High Priest of Fan-Tan in the House of Chance, Number One greetings and happy good luck!" Shun Tai dictated. "Thy humble friend sends an unworthy gift to mark thy Day of Beginning. Long life, plenteous riches, and seven sons to mourn at thy grave."

The gold-dipped brush moved in swift, sure strokes under Sang Lee's skilful fingers, but a creeping Dragon of Fear tiptoed along his spine as he worked, for Shun Tai stood behind him.

Sang Lee would not permit himself to turn around, but from time to time he flicked a glance toward a gong hanging on the opposite wall—a gong polished to mirror-brightness, in which he could see Shun Tai's face, wreathed in pale blue smoke that smelled like devil-joss. And Shun Tai was smiling.

"It is finished," Sang Lee announced, waving a palm-leaf fan over the glistening scroll. "Sign here, Shun Tai."

The Manchu took the brush and wrote his name, and Sang Lee's lips curled in silent scorn of the crooked and laborious smear, scarce worthy of a coolie's thick fingers.

"You will make prompt delivery to Mark Sin?" Shun Tai queried, casting down the promised fee as one throws coins to a beggar.

"I will depart as soon as the ink has dried," Lee promised.

"Hsieh! Hsieh!" Shun Tai said, and made his exit with that same lean and hungry smile the scrivener had observed in the metal face of the gong.

SANG LEE stood listening until the street door closed, then he glided to the curtained window and peered out. Shun Tai halted for a moment on the moonlit pavement, but he made no visible signal toward the deep shadow where Chin Yut kept watch. Without so much as a glance in that direction, he turned and set off briskly toward Mulberry Lane.

Sang Lee kept his eyes on the shadows for a good ten minutes, but Chin Yut did not emerge to follow his master.

"Here is a warning written in large letters," young Lee murmured. "While I am absent on the tiger's business, the jackal will try to steal my money-jar, so that I will be stripped of the marriage-price."

Frowning in deep thought, Sang Lee paced to and fro until a sudden idea dawned upon him.

"*Hai!* There are always two paths around a mountain," Lee said to himself, and taking the precious jar from its shelf, he wrapped it in a black cloth and went down the stairs. Concealing the dark bundle in the crook of his arm, Sang Lee darted swiftly from his own doorstep to the neighboring shop of Loy Hong.

"Father Loy," he said to the old merchant, "I have sudden fear of night-thieves. In order to ease my mind, I will pay the marriage-price for Lily into your hands here and now."

"No! No!" Loy Hong replied sharply, drawing back as if the jar were filled with writhing snakes. "It is Number One bad joss to touch marriage-money before the day and date agreed upon."

But Sang Lee observed how the merchant's voice trembled as he spoke, and how his glance wavered uneasily. "You are afraid of Shun Tai!" he accused hotly. "The Manchu has put a fear upon you, so that you shiver at mere mention of his name."

"I will not depart from the strict letter of the contract," Loy Hong replied. "Shun Tai is a man of short temper and long arm."

Sang Lee drew a hissing breath. "He is also a merchant of the forbidden *chandoo*, a captain of thieves and thugs, and a spiller of honest blood! Would you have such a one for son-in-law?"

"If such be the will of Tao," Loy Hong answered, and added dryly, "A dead man eats no rice. I am in no haste to join my ancestral circle in the Shadow-world."

"Then I will fight against this man of evil, alone and unaided!" Sang Lee cried.

"With what weapons?" Loy Hong countered. "Will painted prayers stop Shun Tai's bullet? Are your little bamboo brushes a match for Shun Tai's knife?"

"Why not?" Sang Lee answered angrily. "Shun Tai is but flesh and bone and blood. In the appointed hour his deeds will be measured in the Scales of Yan-Tan, and Justice will be done."

But Loy Hong would not accept the marriage-money, and young Lee could only withdraw to his shop, noticing as he went that Chin Yut still waited in the shadows.

"There remains a second path around this mountain of trouble," Sang Lee murmured, breaking open the seal of the blue jar and packing the money into a secret inner pocket of his jacket. "Even the cleverest thief cannot steal eggs from an empty nest." Picking up Shun Tai's gift package and good-luck greeting, he set out for the house of Mark Sin in Paradise Court.

Hushed and silent, Pagoda Street lay bathed in moonlight that was like a frosty silver dusk; bustling Mulberry Lane wore a blazing necklace of mazda and neon; but no matter how high the moon might ride, Paradise Court was ever a place of deep shadow.

There are four entrances to this notorious Court, each equally dark, each marked by a single gas-lamp whose feeble glow is held in siege by a darkness like black velvet.

Sang Lee plunged into the entrance from Mulberry Lane, but he had not taken a score of steps before he heard the soft pad-pad of slippered feet following behind him. Instantly he flattened himself against the wall, but the stealthy steps behind him ceased at once, and Sang Lee knew that danger threatened.

"*Hoya!*" he breathed. "If Chin Yut has followed me, then it is my life they seek!"

With eyes and ears straining against the darkness, he began to sidle along the wall, foot by foot; but as soon as he moved, the creeping sounds followed.

Sang Lee saw the critical moment approaching when his figure would stand outlined by the sentinel lamp ahead. But just as he gathered himself to make a flying leap across the lighted area, another figure loomed up before him, blocking his path.

THEN the man behind him called out a signal, and two more dark shadows sprang into being; but to Sang Lee's amazement the swift attack which followed was directed not against himself, but against the man who had halted under the lamp.

And silent as a scene in a Peking shadow-play, a dark arm swung a club; and the ambushed victim, struck from behind, went down in a limp heap, without so much as a whispered gasp.

Like ghostly vultures the three dark figures closed in on the spot, crouching down beside their victim. They seemed to be turning him over, pulling him half-upright, while the man with the club stood ready to deliver another blow.

Then a match flared, and Sang Lee saw the face of Chin Yut above the spurting flame, like a shining copper-painted mask.

"*Ai-yee!*" Chin Yut hissed, and dropped the match with a snarling curse. Somewhere in the Court a door banged to the sound of voices, and letting the sagging body fall back to the ground, the three slant-eyed thugs took to their heels.

As Sang Lee breathed a prayer of thanks to Kwan-Yin for this miraculous escape, the sprawling figure on the ground moved a little and gave a feeble groan. The scrivener hurried to his side and helped him rise.

"Danger has departed," young Lee said. "The night-devils who attacked you have fled, but no doubt they had sufficient time to empty your pockets."

"*Hai!*" the swaying victim exclaimed, groping in his sash. "My money is untouched—fan-tan money won this very night at Mark Sin's tables. *Hai!* Fortune has smiled upon me!"

"And upon me," said Sang Lee under his breath, then added aloud: "I will guide your steps back to the House of Chance, where you may rest a while and have the wound on your head bathed and bandaged."

THE *mafoo* on guard at Mark Sin's door cried out when he saw streaks of blood on the fan-tan player's face, and made a quick examination of the swollen cut while Sang Lee described the attack. "Me fix," the *mafoo* declared, and took charge of the wounded man as Sang Lee mounted the stairs to Mark Sin's private office.

"I bring a package and a writing from Shun Tai the Manchu," Sang Lee announced.

"Welcome and gracious thanks," the moon-faced gambler replied, bowing only from the neck, for he was fat as a Szechuen pig. But his agile fingers soon unfastened the intricate wrappings of Shun Tai's package, and a small teakwood box with silver trimmings stood revealed.

"*Hola!*" Mark Sin exclaimed as he lifted the lid. "An

incense bowl—of flawless jade!" He touched it expertly with a moistened forefinger. "Aye, it is a genuine *fei-tsui.*"

"You are surprised?" asked Sang Lee.

"It is a large gift for a small friendship," Mark Sin replied in a dry tone. "On Shun Tai's last visit to my tables, we came near to the drawing of knives over a disputed wager."

"There is more in this than meets the eye!" young Lee exclaimed. "Shun Tai did send *two* gifts in this one box: for you, the jade bowl; for me, the Long Sleep."

Whereupon Sang Lee told him of the ambush which had been set in the darkness of Paradise Court, and how Chin Yut the hireling had spat out angry curses when the flaring match revealed that a stranger had blundered into their snare.

"A small candle will serve to light a large room," Mark Sin replied. "Have I not heard, Sang Lee, that your shadow stands inconveniently between Shun Tai and the fair maiden Lily Loy?"

"It is true," Sang Lee said, and went on angrily, "I will seek out this treacherous Manchu on the open street and shout in a loud voice how he sent me on a false errand, so that I might fall into the hands of his hirelings."

"Think twice—and twice again," Mark Sin counseled. "Is it wise to throw a stone at a hungry tiger?"

"Would you have me keep silence?" young Lee demanded hotly. "Would you have me smile and kowtow to this man of evil who tried to steal my shadow?"

"Not so," Mark Sin answered, "but before you face Shun Tai it were best that you acquire skill in the use of the Manchu's weapons. Does a man cast himself into the sea before he has learned to swim?"

"These are words of wisdom," Sang Lee agreed. *"Wah!* I shall purchase a Han knife and a Rice-Face pistol. But now I beg a favor, Mark Sin: that you keep safe for me the money I have gathered together for the marriage-price of Lily Loy."

"With gladness," Mark Sin replied.

So young Lee opened his secret pocket and counted out the money, for which the moon-faced gambler wrote out a paper of receipt.

"Fat to thy bones, Mark Sin, and long life to the fat," Sang Lee said by way of thanks.

"May your shadow increase," Mark Sin replied.

Thus Sang Lee the scrivener left the House of Chance in Paradise Court and returned to Pagoda Street by a roundabout way, and with a wary eye for dark corners.

Safe once more behind bolted doors, he rolled Mark Sin's receipt into a tight little cylinder and hid it in the hollow handle of one of his writing-brushes. And for a long time afterward he sat pondering the steps by which he might change himself from a Man of Painted Words into a Man of Dragon Deeds.

But the Lords of Destiny were not pleased to grant Sang Lee time to change his pen for a sword.

ON THE very next evening, when young Lee picked up his moon-fiddle to play his usual goodnight music for the ears of Lily Loy, her silhouette did not appear on the drawn shades of the tea merchant's house, and Sang Lee grew troubled, for never before had his Fair One failed to send her shadowed greeting.

Nevertheless, he played his song through to the end, the famous Limehouse song beginning "Love comes to the least of men. . ."

Then suddenly a shadow fell upon the lighted screen—a shadow black and tall and rugged. It loomed briefly and was gone, but the moon-fiddle slipped unheeded from Sang Lee's fingers. "It is the shadow of the Manchu Devil!" he whispered.

Sang Lee stared at the masked windows. Lily was there; Lily must have heard his music, but she had not given her signal. Why? Was it because she could not—because of Shun Tai's presence?

With quickened breath, young Lee glided down the stairs and into Pagoda Street. There was still a light in Loy Hong's shop window, and he pressed his face against the glass. What he saw within drew a startled gasp, for it was Chin Yut, the tiger's jackal, who stood behind the counter in place of Loy Hong's familiar clerk!

Forgetting all else in the face of this sinister omen, Sang Lee wrenched open the door and invaded the shop. "Where is Loy Hong the merchant?" he demanded. "I would speak with him at once!"

"It cannot be," Chin Yut replied, eyes narrowed. "Loy Hong is at his prayers and may not be disturbed."

"By Tao, you lie!" Sang Lee cried, and started swiftly for the leather-curtained doorway at the back of the shop.

"Chan-choh! Stop!" Chin Yut snarled as he vaulted over the counter with cat-like ease, and plucking a double-edged knife from his belt, lunged furiously at Sang Lee. But the young scrivener side-stepped his enemy with neat precision, and Chin Yut's fiery stroke drove deep into the wooden counter. Spitting curses, Chin Yut wrenched his knife free.

Sang Lee's fingers, groping blindly in search of a weapon, closed on one of the round iron weights used in the tea-scales. He flung it pointblank at Chin Yut's head, and the knife-man's forward rush ended in a half somersault and a thudding collapse to the floor.

"Hai!" shrilled a voice, and Sang Lee whirled toward the curtained doorway to find Shun Tai himself standing there!

To Sang Lee's eyes the dreaded Manchu had never looked taller nor more menacing than at that moment; but with a courage born of sheer desperation he faced the smooth-voiced killer, closing his hand on the blade which had fallen from Chin Yut's nerveless fingers.

"Where is Loy Hong?" he demanded. "And where is Lily? What have you done with them?"

Shun Tai moved forward with a cold, steady smile. "Your questions shall be answered—and soon," he said softly. A quick flick of the arm brought a shining knife into his hand, while a backward kick helped the bewildered Chin Yut to regain his feet.

"Lock the door. Draw the shades." Shun Tai flung his orders without taking his eyes from Sang Lee, and the Manchu's cruel smile widened as the young scrivener dropped into an awkward fighting crouch.

"Now, my little slinger-of-ink, I will give you a lesson in the art of the knife."

SWIFT as the strike of a hooded cobra, Shun Tai's arm snapped out in a sudden, vicious blow, so that no more than a finger's width stood between Sang Lee and sudden death as he scrambled aside.

"Hai! You are quick of foot!" the Manchu said, still grinning, but little red hate-devils danced in his black eyes, and again that snaky arm lashed out.

Sang Lee struck back with the upward-sweeping thrust which is the deadliest of all counterstrokes, only to have his arm knocked aside, and himself sent sprawling from contact with the Manchu's hip and shoulder, braced as solidly as a stone wall.

"Up, bungler, and try again." Shun Tai smiled mockingly. "First I will take away your knife, then I will break you between my hands like a bamboo stick."

Goaded to reckless fury, Sang Lee scrambled to his feet and hurled himself forward. The next moment his knife-hand was caught in a grip like an iron vise, and the

weapon forced from his fingers by a bone-cracking wrench.

Fighting desperately as the Manchu's grip tightened slowly and relentlessly, young Lee doubled up his fist in the Rice-Face manner and flailed at Shun Tai's head and face.

"*Hai!* Little *tuchun* of the inkpots!" Shun Tai jeered, impervious to the shower of random blows. Holding his half-strangled victim at arm's length, he swung him first to the right, then to the left, then slammed him hard against the wall.

Dazed by the crashing impact, Sang Lee reeled like one drunken with *samshu*. Floating in a misty haze, the hated face of the Manchu grinned at him, and there upon the floor lay his fallen knife, shining temptingly.

Shun Tai chuckled in high glee as young Lee swooped down upon the weapon; laughed, and stamped his heavy boot on Sang Lee's reaching fingers, then swung the same boot in a vicious arc that caught the young scrivener above the ear.

Sang Lee groaned and slipped headlong into roaring darkness. . . .

A THIN blade of light began to pierce the black world which held Sang Lee captive; it grew broader and brighter, like a rising sun, until he blinked in the glare and turned his head aside. Slowly it dawned upon him that the light came from his own familiar lamp, standing on the foot-high writing-desk.

But how had this come about? He had fought with Shun Tai in Loy Hong's shop, yet here he was lying on the floor of his own quarters, bound firmly hand and foot, and gagged. Why had the victorious Manchu spared his life? And why was he being held prisoner in his own shop?

Then the scrivener held himself very still, for a yellow face had loomed beyond the lamp. It was a slant-eyed tongster, busy ransacking his desk, scattering the papers, pushing inkpots aside, peering into the brush-jars. With a muttered curse the searcher crossed the room and began to pull apart the little household shrine which stood in a corner.

He worked with angry speed, but he was careful in his search, nevertheless.

"*Hoya!* He is searching for the marriage-money!" young Lee said to himself. Lying motionless, he watched through half-veiled lids as the searcher tapped over the woodwork for hollow spaces and scanned the floor-boards with expert eye.

Grumbling over his lack of success, the tongster cast an appraising glance at the inert prisoner, then went swiftly down the stairs.

Sang Lee twisted himself upright, looking at the disordered room. Let them hunt as long as they liked—his precious savings were beyond the Manchu's reach. But were they? Shun Tai would stop at nothing to gain his ends. If he could not find the money by searching, he would adopt a more ruthless method. Torture.

Young Lee sat trying to trace the pattern of events still to come. Here he was, prisoner of Shun Tai, and no doubt the tea merchant and his daughter were also caught fast in the Manchu's pitiless web. If he could only free himself before the tongster returned. . . .

But he twisted and tugged at his bonds in vain. The binding cords were tough and strong as a shark-line, and firmly knotted. Nothing less than a sharp knife would serve to free him. Sang Lee tried to catch the cloth gag between his teeth, to gnaw at it.

Then he had a better idea. Rolling across the floor, he managed to get one of the little carved knobs on a corner of the desk up under the gag. A tug or two, and the cloth loosened. . . .

SANG LEE was still on his knees before the desk when footsteps sounded on the stairs and the tongster entered. "*Hai!*" he shouted angrily on seeing the loosened gag, and flattened Sang Lee with a stinging back-handed blow.

"Set me free," the scrivener whispered hoarsely as the tongster bent over him to make sure the ropes were still in place, "and I promise you a hundred silver pieces."

"Not for a thousand pieces," the tongster growled, tightening the gag until Sang Lee's jaws ached. "It would be coffin-money."

A few minutes later Shun Tai entered the word-shop, with Chin Yut by his side. The Manchu towered high above his huddled prisoner, staring down at him with disdain as he motioned to the tongster to release the twisted gag.

"Now we will talk, Sang Lee, and with short words. You have pitted your strength against mine, and lost. *Wah!* There is only one way for you to purchase life and liberty: renounce your marriage-claim to the maiden Lily Loy."

"Never," Sang Lee flared. "The marriage-day stands written in the book of the Five Tongs, and the marriage-price has been hidden away beyond reach of your thieving fingers! I am your prisoner but I am not afraid. Our quarrel is known, Shun Tai, and I have friends. Should you kill me, there will be an outcry so loud that the Blue Coat Men will hear of it, and you will find yourself locked away in the Rice-Face *yamen* of stone walls and iron doors."

"You are clever with words, my little dragon," Shun Tai mocked, and added softly, "but there are other ways of roasting pig than by burning down the house. *Hoya!* You will see."

The Manchu gave a brisk signal to Chin Yut, who turned and left the shop, while the tongster bolted the door behind him. Shun Tai lit one of his blond Chinese cigars, then sauntered over and raised the window which faced Loy Hong's private quarters.

"Loy Hong and the fair Lily are waiting over there, in the room opposite this," Shun Tai explained, grinning. "Now I see Chin Yut at the window. He is raising it a few inches, so that we may hear. Listen!"

Sang Lee caught his breath as an anguished shriek rang out in Loy Hong's quarters—a yelping scream quickly smothered into a bubbling moan.

"No doubt you recognize the voice of Loy Hong," Shun Tai remarked pleasantly. "It is somewhat painful to have bamboo splinters driven under one's nails." Then the Manchu's voice lashed out like a whip. "Think well, Sang Lee! Chin Yut has my orders—to count to one hundred, and if you have not yielded, it will be Lily's turn with the bamboo."

"You would not dare!" Sang Lee stammered wildly. "Lily—she is only a girl, Shun Tai! Torture—"

"The choice is yours," Shun Tai said calmly, blowing out a puff of smoke.

With a furious cry, young Lee tugged and twisted at his bonds, until his breath whistled in his throat and beads of sweat dotted his face. "You devil!" he panted. "You four-horned devil!"

"Lily Loy's time grows shorter," Shun Tai reminded him. "At any moment—"

"Stop!" Sang Lee gasped. "I yield, Shun Tai. Spare the maiden from harm, and I will do your bidding."

"*Wah!*" said the Manchu, and clapped his hands together in a sharp signal that brought Chin Yut to the Loy window.

"All goes well!" Shun Tai called across the intervening space; then closing the window, he regarded the scrivener

with a gloating smile. "Hear my orders, Sang Lee, and obey. First you will bring the marriage-money from its hiding place and give it into my keeping."

"I cannot," Sang Lee answered. "The money is not hidden here. It lies in the hands of Mark Sin the gambler."

"You lie!" the Manchu snapped.

"I speak truth," Sang Lee declared. "Release me from these ropes and I will place proof in your hands."

So the Manchu took out a knife and cut his cords, and Sang Lee picked out the bamboo brush in which he had hidden the gambler's receipt, snapped it in two, and unrolled the little cylinder of paper.

"Here is Mark Sin's debt-paper, but it is worthless to you. He will not pay out the money to any save the rightful owner."

THE Manchu was silent, pondering this dilemma. Then a sly smile spread over his face. *"Wah!* I have a Number One plan. It is night, and the streets are dark. You and I, Sang Lee, will go to the House of Chance and collect this money from Mark Sin." He turned to the tongster. "Yuen-lo, tell Chin Yut I would speak to him."

When Chin Yut arrived, Shun Tai explained his plan of action. "I will walk beside Sang Lee. Yuen-lo, follow fifty paces behind us. If trouble comes, I will blow this silver whistle, and you will hasten back to Loy Hong's shop. Chin Yut, you know what measures to take in that case?"

"Aye, master," Chin Yut replied, squeezing his hands tight shut in a sinister gesture.

Shun Tai addressed the scrivener. "Remember, Sang Lee, the life of Lily Loy is hostage for your obedience by word and deed."

"I have no choice but to obey," Sang Lee said in a toneless voice. "The Lords of Destiny have delivered me into your hands."

Thus they left the word-shop on Pagoda Street, Sang Lee and the Manchu walking side by side, with Yuen-lo trailing them at the agreed distance. Shun Tai kept to the shadowy rim of each street, choosing those which were darkest and least frequented. But it was necessary to cross the brightly lit Mulberry Lane, and as they emerged on this main thoroughfare, a Blue Coat Man loomed up not twenty paces away.

"Hi there, Sang Lee!" called the Blue Coat Man, casting a suspicious glance at the tall Manchu.

"Remember!" Shun Tai hissed, the light glinting from the silver whistle in his hand.

"Ala wah!" Sang Lee called back politely to the policeman, who strolled on past Long Jon's Tea House, swinging his Big Stick as he went, and Shun Tai chuckled as he gripped the scrivener's arm in the dark alley which led to Paradise Court.

When they reached Mark Sin's House of Chance, Shun Tai halted in the shadows until the trailing tongster joined them.

"Here is the money-receipt, Sang Lee," the Manchu said, pressing the paper into his hand. "But be warned! When you speak to Mark Sin, choose your words with care, for *this* will be pointed at your back!"

And Shun Tai nudged the scrivener with a black pistol. "Yuen-lo," he ordered, "wait here, and with sharpened ears. If you hear a pistol-shot within the house—"

"Aye, master," Yuen-lo replied, "I carry the death-signal to Chin Yut."

MARK SIN'S *mafoo* opened the door to the Manchu's brisk knocking, and led them to the gambler's office. Mark Sin's narrow brows curved upward when he saw his visitors.

"I have come to reclaim my money," Sang Lee stated in a level voice.

"It is yours to command," the gambler replied. "But the hour is late, and the streets are dark. Have you no fear of robbers?"

"My friend Shun Tai will see to it that I reach home safely," Sang Lee answered.

"So you are friends now?" Mark Sin exclaimed. "Have I not heard whispers of a bitter rivalry between you, concerning the girl Lily Loy?"

"A matter of misunderstanding," Sang Lee said. "Shun Tai and I have talked together, and there is no further cause for quarrel."

"Aye," the Manchu put in softly. "Sang Lee and I are bound together as closely as blood-brothers."

"Wah! My ears rejoice at the news," said Mark Sin, and struck a small gong to summon the *mafoo*. "My iron cash-box!" he ordered. "Sang Lee, you have brought the money-receipt I gave you?"

Taking the paper in his fat yellow fingers, he carefully smoothed it out; then opening his iron box, slowly and carefully counted out the required sum from a thick sheaf of bills.

"Gracious thanks!" said Sang Lee, picking up the money.

"Happy good luck," replied Mark Sin, and turned to the Manchu. "Shun Tai, there will be a Number One fan-tan game two nights hence. Will you honor my house with your presence?"

"Count upon it like tomorrow's sun," Shun Tai replied, smiling blandly.

And so Shun Tai and Sang Lee emerged from the House of Chance in Paradise Court, and there stood Yuen-lo awaiting them in the shadows.

"We will return to Pagoda Street in the same order by which we came," the Manchu commanded, and when they were back in the word-shop he said, "Now, Sang Lee, hand over the money."

In silence, his face inscrutable, Sang Lee emptied his pockets, watching his precious savings pass into the hands of his enemy.

"Hearken now to my plans," Shun Tai continued. "Until the marriage-day, Sang Lee, you will remain shut up in these rooms, making no attempt to escape. To all who inquire, Yuen-lo will say that you have a sickness, and cannot move from your *k'ang.*"

The Manchu grinned at his victim. "On the marriage-day I will summon the Clerk of the Five Tongs Council. You will tell him that you lack money to fulfil your contract with Loy Hong. Thus Lily will be free, and I will make my own terms with the merchant her father. It is agreed?"

"Have done with your mockery," Sang Lee said bitterly. "I am a prisoner twice over. What choice of answers have I?"

"Hoya! When the sheep bids defiance to the tiger, he must pay for his folly. Had you been wise—"

Then abruptly Shun Tai was silent, head tilted as he listened, for suddenly the purr and throb of motors filled Pagoda Street, car doors slammed, and crisp footsteps disturbed the midnight hush.

With an oath the Manchu sprang to the window and looked out. "Red devil-cars—at Loy Hong's door!" he spat. "Blue Coat Men!"

Shun Tai hurled a hissing order to Yuen-lo; the startled tongster tore open the door and scurried down the stairs. But already the Blue Coat Men had swung into action at Loy Hong's shop, smashing their way through the tea merchant's door to the jangling crash of glass and the splintering of wood.

Screaming with rage, Shun Tai whirled upon the scrivener, who made a flying leap for the doorway. But the Manchu blocked his way and flung him back into the room, banged the door shut and slammed home the bolts. He spun around then, plucking the black pistol from his belt.

"This is *your* work!" he said. "You have tricked me, after all; but by Tao, you shall not live to boast of it!"

STREAKS of pale orange flame spat from the black muzzle, the walls echoed with the vicious detonations, and Sang Lee cried out under the grinding bite of flying steel. For a moment he swayed unsteadily, then his knees sagged and he slid to the floor, face down.

"Wah!" the Manchu snarled, and sprang to the side-window. From behind the drawn shades of Loy Hong's quarters came sounds of raging battle—shots echoed in the midst of screams and the pounding thud of hand-to-hand struggle between yellow men and white.

At the window Shun Tai waited in icy calm, gun in hand.

Behind him, unheeded, Sang Lee slowly raised his head, eyes fixed on his implacable enemy. Intuition told him what plan seethed now in the Manchu's brain. Like the black shadow of Yo Fei the Destroyer, Shun Tai would strike at Lily Loy—kill her, rather than see his rival triumphant.

Slowly, silently, Sang Lee began to crawl forward on hands and knees, biting down on his lip at the paralyzing pain which came with movement. He could feel the warm blood sweeping down over his chest, but he knew that a gasp, even a whimpering breath, would draw Shun Tai's attention—and another bullet.

But the Manchu's eyes were riveted to the yellow shades in the opposite room, where grappling shadows twisted and turned. Then came a heavy thud, and Chin Yut's voice rocketed in pain. Abruptly the battle was at an end.

With hissing breath Shun Tai leaned forward . . . the black pistol barked at the lighted window . . . broken glass fell in a tinkling shower and the bullet-torn shade rolled itself up with a clatter, like a swift curtain rising on the last scene of a drama. There in plain sight stood Chin Yut, a prisoner of the Blue Coat Men; there stood the trembling Loy Hong, with his slender daughter by his side, clinging to his arm through the swift pace of events.

"Hai!" Shun Tai shouted in gloating triumph. The girl gave a gasping cry as she saw the black pistol leveling itself at her; and Sang Lee, hearing that cry, gathered his strength for a diving lunge at the Manchu's legs.

The treacherous bullet sped harmlessly into the night as Shun Tai came toppling down, and the next moment the Manchu found his gun-hand pinned to the floor as Sang Lee's whole lithe body coiled like a python around his arm.

Snarling and cursing, Shun Tai tried to pry him loose with his free hand. He battered him with his fist, dug powerful fingers into his neck in search of the windpipe. But Sang Lee held fast with arms and legs entwined; held fast despite the frantic brutality of Shun Tai's full strength.

Then the Manchu changed his grip, and seizing Sang Lee by the hair, pounded his head against the boards. Half-stunned, with senses reeling, Sang Lee felt himself growing limp; but still he clung fast, with the room spinning before his eyes, and in his ears a great booming beat like the wooden war drums of the Dragon Tong.

"Tao lend me strength!" he prayed through clenched teeth, and clutched even more frantically at the enemy who was slipping away from his boneless fingers. . . .

"SANG LEE! Sang Lee!" a voice called—a Rice-Face voice, faint and far-away, then suddenly louder, stronger. Sang Lee opened his eyes and blinked. The door of his shop hung crazily on one hinge, its panels shattered, and a circle of faces hovered above him: Blue Coat Men! And one face he knew well—red-haired Sergeant O'Hara, *tuchun* of the Chinatown Squad.

"Sah-jin," he whispered. "Lily—she is safe?"

"Yeah, she's safe, all right," Sergeant O'Hara said. "You sure put up a swell fight, Lee. You were still hangin' on like grim death when we broke down the door."

Sang Lee blinked and smiled. Number One pain-devils were driving red-hot nails through his shoulder, but there stood Shun Tai the tiger and Chin Yut the jackal, linked together by shining bracelets of steel. And Lily was safe—Lily was safe.

Sergeant O'Hara beckoned to a moon-faced Chinaman hovering near the door. "Here, you, Mark Sin, let's have your part of the story. How did you find out that Loy Hong and his daughter were being held prisoners?"

Mark Sin stepped forward and bowed. "Sah-jin, Sang Lee ask me to keep his marriage-money in my iron box, because he had fear Shun Tai would rob him. *Wah!* Tonight he return and ask for his money. Shun Tai is by his side. They call each other friend, and say there is peace between them, but when I ask for return of my money-receipt, Sang Lee gives me instead a paper on which is written: 'Loy Hong and Lily his daughter are prisoners of Shun Tai. Send the Blue Coat Men to Loy's shop with all speed.' I say nothing, Sah-jin, but when Sang Lee and the Manchu have departed, I run to the police *yamen*."

"Gracious thanks, Mark Sin!" Sang Lee whispered, rising on one elbow. "I was cold with dread that you would speak an incautious word before Shun Tai."

"I saw at first glance," said Mark Sin, "that your writing was made in fear and trembling, for the brush-marks were so shaken and crooked that I could scarce read what was written."

Sang Lee smiled. "It was not fear that made my brush unsteady. I was a prisoner, bound hand and foot. I made the writing with the brush held between my teeth."

"Well, I'll be damned!" O'Hara exclaimed.

"It was not difficult to write," Sang Lee continued, "but I could not pick up the paper because my hands were bound behind my back. But later, Shun Tai himself cut my bonds so that I might reveal the hiding place of Mark Sin's receipt; and while he feasted his greedy eyes on the money-paper, I secretly slipped the warning into my sleeve."

"So you switched papers, eh?" O'Hara said. "And right under Shun Tai's nose! You had your nerve with you, Lee."

"Tsai! I found out long ago that the Manchu's eye is ignorant of the painted word," Sang Lee replied scornfully. "It has been written, Sah-jin, that for every man there is a weapon suited to his hand and skill. With Tao's help, even a bamboo brush may prove superior to a sword of polished steel."

Destroyer!

By Steve Fisher

Start now this unforgettable story of three brave people fighting to defend America against invasion

EARLY that spring war came to America. The guns were not thundering yet but every American knew that the Axis Powers—Germany, Italy and Japan—were ready to strike. Spain demanded a portion of Louisiana; Mexico wanted territory in Texas. Then, suddenly, Russia landed troops in Alaska. The United States stood alone against the world.

JEFF BARRET, a lieutenant on an S-boat stationed in the Caribbean, knows that he won't live long in this war. For the obsolescent S-boats will be used in the first line of defense, to harry the Atlantic fleet of the invaders. They are a suicide fleet. So when Jeff learns from CAPTAIN KNIGHT that the *S-60* is putting in at Cristobal, he is delighted. Probably it will be his last leave; and he knows that his close friend NICK WATERS is in Panama.

ONE of the finest living novelists, a veteran of many wars, Nick Waters has established himself in Cristobal to work at counter-espionnage, though he has no official connection with the government. Then he is joined in Cristobal by the girl he loves, beautiful KATHIE WINTERS, who is the foreign correspondent for a big news magazine. Nick is overjoyed to see her, and yet bitterly certain that she considers him simply a valuable source of information.

Mixing with the third-rate spies, the small-time Fifth Columnists who are legion in Cristobal, Nick Waters has collected one piece of information that he considers of vital importance. He has heard that the Nazis have established an air base on an obscure island off the coast of Colombia; that from this base the Germans plan to launch a raid on the Panama Canal.

Nick carries this information to BARTON CRAIG, chief of U. S. Intelligence in Panama, and Craig is frankly sceptical. But, he says, the United States cannot afford to ignore any rumor so potentially dangerous. He will swear in Nick Waters as a government agent; he will provide him with a plane and pilot to make a reconnaissance flight over the island. Of course, Craig says, if the Germans should have a base there, Nick stands no chance of returning alive. . . .

CHAPTER VI

THIS WAR IS DIFFERENT

CRAIG returned to the work that was piled up on his desk. He had a number of reports to read and act upon. Now and then he picked up the phone and gave an

This story began in last week's Argosy

order for this man or that. Nick sat with his hands in his lap.

At last the door opened and a young Navy flyer walked in. He was introduced as Lieutenant Williams and Nick shook hands with him. The proposed trip was roundly discussed and it was decided that Nick and Williams would go over a number of charts and lay out an exploratory course. They were to take off as soon after this was done as possible.

Nick left the room and followed Williams out of the building. The lieutenant lit a cigarette. He didn't want to seem anxious, and yet it was apparent that he wished to know what their chances were. At last, he said:

"Do you think we'll come back?"

"No." There was no point in lying.

Williams flipped his cigarette into the street. "It was just I wanted to call my wife," he said. He looked a little sheepish. "She arrived in Panama only tonight. We were having dinner in my cottage when the Intelligence sent for me."

He smiled boyishly and showed Nick a picture of his wife. She was very pretty. "I'll call her, then we'll go somewhere and get down to business with these charts." His wife's name was Hannah. When they were in the car, he said: "Hannah's swell. Gee, it was sure good to see her again!" He fell silent, and Nick, driving, said nothing.

IT WAS ten of four in the morning, and Nick was ready to go. He sat on the edge of his creaky bed, wearing a leather jacket, a cigarette dangling in his mouth. At last he picked up the phone and asked the operator to connect him with Kathrine's room. She answered at once.

"I hope I didn't awaken you," he said. "I saw a light in your transom as I came by."

"I've been up," she said. "What is it, Nick?"

"I'd like to see you for a minute. Are you decent?"

She laughed. "I think so."

He entered her room from the hall. She wore a fluffy white zipper robe, and white mules, and she sat on the bed, playing solitaire. The make-up had been scrubbed from her face and she looked amazingly like a little girl. The soft red hair flounced on her shoulders and she turned her head.

"What are you doing up?"

"I couldn't sleep," she said. She scooped the cards into her hand. She was sitting with her legs folded under her. It was the way she always sat. Nick remembered because it was a feat he was unable to accomplish without breaking both of his legs. He thought there was very much he remembered about Kathie.

"It's different this time, isn't it, Nick?"

"What?"

"The war," she said. "It's different for us. Before it was always some game we played. It was somebody else's grief and none of our own. We did what we could in those wars, but there were times when we had fun—and there was a glamour about it. This time there's no glamour."

"You shouldn't think," he said. "It only makes you a little crazy to think, Kathie."

"But it's *our* country this time, Nick. You asked me why I couldn't sleep. I—"

"I'm going away, Kathie," he said.

She stopped talking, looked up at him.

"I'll probably be back in a couple of days," he said. He was conscious that he was overdoing it. "I just thought I'd tell you," he went on quickly. He started backing to the door.

"Nick, you came to say goodbye!"

"Yes," he said.

"Oh, Nick—" She jumped off the bed.

"I wanted to ask you a favor."

"Of course. Anything!"

He fumbled with a radiogram. "I got this downstairs just a little while ago. A friend of mine is due tonight about six—a young submarine officer. I wondered if you'd meet him for me."

"I'll be glad to."

"His name's Jeff Barret."

"Do you know him well?"

"Yes," Nick said, "quite well. He's my best friend."

He looked at her, and there were eloquent ways he wanted to say goodbye. Instead, he said: "So long, kid." Then he moved out through the door and down the hall. The street was wet, and in the gas light it shone blue. Lieutenant Williams was waiting for him.

CHAPTER VII

NIGHT IN CRISTOBAL

JEFF BARRET came off the *S-60* wearing immaculate tropic whites, his officer's cap on the side of his head, his face darkly sunburnt. He was in step with Lieutenant Morris.

They both saw the girl. She wore a white drill skirt and jacket, and a light-texture navy blue sweater. Her hat was white, off the face; and her reddish hair, rolled at the ends, brushed her shoulders.

"She's lovely," Jeff breathed. "Isn't she lovely, though!"

"The answer to a sailor's prayer," Mr. Morris said. "Mister, I'll match you to see who speaks to her!"

But the girl was approaching.

"Which of you is Jeff Barret?" Her voice was soft, and low.

Jeff was beaming, incredulous. He could scarcely speak.

"He is, lady," Mr. Morris said. "I don't know where he gets all the luck!"

That was the way it was, and Jeff knew that he would always remember. She had told him about Nick; that he had gone off on a government mission, and from there they went on to other subjects. They walked along the road, chattering furiously.

They passed streams of soldiers and sailors who were carrying stocks of green bananas, tiny parrots, and Spanish shawls. The sailors, in whites, scuffed along, laughing and talking, strewing peanut and cocoanut shells in their wake. Now and again a cart clattered past.

It didn't occur to either Jeff or Kathie that even now, at dusk, the scarlet sun was hot, or that they had walked over a mile, wholly engrossed in one another, oblivious to everything else. They were both perspiring and Kathie's nose was shiny.

"Why, sure," Jeff said, "I've read your articles."

"I've always wanted to do one about a submarine sailor," she said.

"Well, I'm your man! That's a terrific sweater you're wearing!"

"It's especially for the Navy: did you notice the color?"

"Yes," he said. Then: "Why haven't we met before? You're not Nick's girl? Tell me quick that you're not

Nick's girl! A thing like that shouldn't happen to me."

"No, I'm not his girl!"

"I'm glad," Jeff said. "I hate triangles. Aren't triangles ugly, though?"

"Yes," she said, "they're very ugly." Then: "Isn't it funny how we hit it off?"

"It's something that never happened to me before," he said.

"Me either," she replied.

It was dark now, starlight darkness, and there was music in the night, and dark Panamanians, and shuffling feet. They were tired, and they went into the nearest bar. There were white leather stools, and soft, frosted lights; there was air-conditioning which nearly froze them.

"I'm going to catch cold," Kathie said.

"No. Don't, please! I shouldn't like you to catch cold."

They ordered drinks, and looked at one another, trying to accustom themselves to each other's personalities, trying to come down to earth.

"I don't know what happened to me!"

"It's the war fever," she said. "War is always like this."

"Then I like the war!"

"No, you don't."

"Well, I like you."

"Yes," she said, "I can tell that."

He sobered. "What about Nick? Is there much danger in this mission?"

"I don't know," Kathie said. "He was very secretive. But I found out this much from the Intelligence—he's off somewhere flying."

"Sounds ominous. If the war should start he'd be—"

"Yes, I know," she said. Then: "Nick's a very old friend of mine."

"And mine."

THEY became conscious now of the man at the next table. He pretended to be occupied with a sandwich but it was obvious that he was listening to everything they said.

It struck Jeff's ironic sense of humor. It was a little like the lurid spy tales he'd read when he was a boy. And yet it suddenly occurred to him that there were times when fact was precisely like melodramatic fiction. After all, he was not a fool, and he realized that Cristobal was infested with every manner of secret agent. He supposed these fellows had to pick up scraps of information as best they could.

He thought very little about it, but he couldn't help but notice now that Kathie's face had paled. She was staring at the man and he was looking at her. He was a hard, gray-faced older man, slim and lithe, with military shoulders. The hair at his temples was iron gray. Responding to Kathie's unfriendly gaze, he rose from his table and came over.

"Kathrine Winters, I believe," he said.

Jeff rose.

"Yes, Herr Stohl," she said. She introduced Jeff. "This is Mark Stohl. I met him several years ago in Berlin. He was an officer in the Gestapo at the time."

Mark Stohl shrugged with a sort of sad eloquence. "Yes, but since then—you are aware of how unbearable it has become in the Reich. I had the bad luck to make a political mistake. I spent a year in a concentration camp, and upon my release I fled the country."

"I presume you could *prove* that," Kathrine said.

"What was that, *fraülein?*"

"I said I don't believe it! You no doubt have papers to prove your statements should local authorities request it. But I nevertheless disbelieve you, Herr Stohl."

The charming smile did not leave his hard, white face. "You Americans are very suspicious these days." He turned to Jeff for pity. "An alien has a very hard time of it, I can tell you!"

"I shall report you to the police, of course," Kathrine said.

"That is most patriotic of you, *fraülein.* But I have seen the police, and all manner of secret service agents. They are quite satisfied with the documents I have been able to present on my behalf."

Kathrine was silent.

"I think," Herr Stohl said, touching his lip, "that you have been talking with Nick Waters."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. But I think he is a dangerous man: by some curious circumstance he is able to have a dozen political affiliations at once." He paused. "It would be frightful if any accident should befall Mr. Waters."

"Listen—" Jeff said.

"Auf wiedersehn!" Herr Stohl bowed curtly. He returned to his table.

Jeff looked at Kathie. "Would you like that Nazi's head bounced against the wall?"

"No," she said. "There's nothing we can do. You see how they protect themselves!" She gathered up her purse. "But let's get out of here."

THEY went to a quaint café on the outskirts of town. The tables were hard-grained wood and candles flickered from them. In the background there was the soft strumming of a string trio. Fat, gaudily dressed women, wisping greasy hair back off their faces, served the hot food in wooden bowls.

Jeff thought that it was undoubtedly the most wonderful place he had ever seen.

Kathie was sulky at first. She said that Nick had spoken of Herr Stohl but at the time she had not realized he was the Gestapo agent she had met briefly once in Berlin. She declared it was a shame Stohl couldn't be removed from Panama. It seemed to her obvious that he had observed Nick's movements; otherwise he would not have known that Kathie had seen Nick.

The candle-light flickered on her grimly serious face as she talked and Jeff silently studied her expressions. He saw that she was a girl who had few illusions about war, and he imagined she was capable of taking care of herself. She ceased talking about Stohl. There was a little silence, then her eyes came up and met Jeff's. She seemed to search his face. Her partly open lips glistened red, and she laughed.

"Oh, darling, I'm glad that you're here!"

"What did you say?"

"I said 'darling.' Don't mind me. I call everyone that."

"Oh, I see."

"But—I—I *wanted* to say it then!"

He gazed at her.

"Really, I did!" she said. "Isn't it silly? I've had to knock around with newspaper men and the like; and a girl has to be a good fellow, you know." She glanced down at her polished nails. "I suppose you've heard of girls like that," she said ruefully. "Men usually slap them on the

back and call them 'sis' or something. Only with you I feel"—she paused—"it's ridiculous! I hate to use the word!"

"What?"

"Feminine," she said. "With you I feel feminine."

"Do you, Kathie?" He couldn't take his eyes off her. He did not know why but the moment seemed very tense to him. "I suppose it's because I'm not in the trade," he went on. "Not a journalist, or anything."

"Perhaps. But it's the strangest feeling!"

"Keep talking," he said.

"Why?"

"Because you're lovely when you talk. Your cheeks are like apple puffs."

She laughed. "What distorted flattery!"

"I guess I'm awkward," he said.

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way! Really I didn't!"

"You see, the trouble is—"

"Yes, darling?"

"The trouble is—I've never fallen in love before."

"Oh, Jeff!"

He felt terribly clumsy and embarrassed. He pushed back his chair and came around the table. She rose. For a moment they just looked at one another, and then he took her in his arms. Her lips were wet and parted; and afterward, as he held her, she was crying and saying his name. The fat woman in the gaudy calico was rattling the dishes as she cleared them away.

AT TWO in the morning they went to a smoky night club. There was a small dance floor, a Marimba band; the tables were covered with checkered cloths. People were talking boisterously above the sound of the music.

Two couples were dancing. A Spanish girl in a gay red dress moved from table to table: *"Cigarettes . . . cigars."* Kathie and Jeff sat opposite one another, grinning like fools, happy with themselves.

Then suddenly from the street there was a terrific wail from the newly installed air-raid sirens. The music stopped. Conversation died in mid air. Waiters with trays of dishes became statues. Patrons stared blankly at one another. No one moved. Faces became chalky.

The sirens wailed pitilessly. Now, all at once, there was movement. Chairs were being pushed back. There was a babble of voices. The manager of the club arrived in the middle of the dance floor and held up his pudgy hands.

"I have a grave announcement to make! *Amigos,* you must listen! It has just come over the radio. Hostilities have commenced in the Far East. In America planes have been sighted over Seattle! The United States has issued an automatic declaration of war against Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia!"

But people were scrambling past him. The manager began to shout. Kathie stared at Jeff.

"What of Nick? Out somewhere in a plane! He'll be—"

"Don't say it!"

There was a stampede of feet past them. The manager of the club had been knocked down in the rush. Then there was the dulled, booming crash of bombs! The whole building began to shake. Fragments of the ceiling rained down. Another bomb rumbled from the street. There was panic and hysteria.

Kathie and Jeff were pressed in the mob at the door. Jeff was holding Kathie, and she kept sobbing, over and over: *"Nick'll be killed!"*

CHAPTER VIII

SWASTIKA IN THE SKY

LIEUTENANT Williams was a good pilot and Nick was able to work very well with him. But notwithstanding that they had flown for hours, their quest had been fruitless. All day long they flew. They came down near half a dozen islands on the wild chance of discovering the one for which they were looking. But it was no soap; and at dusk they returned to Limon Bay and refueled.

The sun had gone down now and the sea was deeply scarlet. It was like an endless ocean of bright blood. Even the white sand on the beach was tainted, and the tall coco palms were dressed in the lengthening shadows of night. A breeze rippled over the bay, and Nick climbed back up into the sea-going Vought. Both he and Williams were tired, worn out.

"We start again?"

"We have to," Nick said.

"Okay, pal," Williams said, and he smiled faintly. His young face was white and drawn. He adjusted his helmet and goggles. Now the motor roared.

Nick wore goggles, and his hair was blowing in the wind. The motor was warm, and Williams lifted his hand. Nick nodded. The sea plane moved swiftly across the vermilion water. It lifted gently, and began to climb. Nick looked down at the water. It fell away rapidly, and the rushing air was cold against his face.

On this trip they had better luck. They found an island (it was miles closer to Panama than the vicinity in which they'd been searching all day) that Nick thought likely. Under the cover of darkness now they came down five miles off the island's southern tip.

Little by little they taxied closer. When they were two miles off shore they silenced the Vought's motor. Nick climbed up on the wing. He sat cross-legged, operating a pair of powerful binoculars. Williams was in the cockpit, ready to give the ship the gun.

The minutes passed endlessly. There was no sound but that of water slapping against the pontoons. More than a half an hour passed. Nick sat tensely, unmoving. Through the binoculars he saw the dense island foliage, very dark. He kept panning his focus along the desolate shore.

Then quite suddenly, something yellow flared up. A soft cry escaped Nick's lips. He was conscious that his heart was beating fast. Now there was another flare. He leaned forward, his whole body tense.

"What is it?" asked Williams.

"Flares, I think!"

He watched, constantly adjusting the glasses. Now he went on: "There's something doing inland! We're apparently on the wrong side of the island. If they have planes they're inland, and on the opposite beach."

For a moment he was silent. The torches became brighter. There was some kind of action taking place on the island. But as yet it proved nothing that was really definite.

"We've got to move closer in."

Williams didn't protest, though both of them knew it was dangerous. "All right."

The sound of the motor was like a shouting in an empty canyon. Nick held tightly against the wing and they skimmed over the water rapidly, taxiing in closer to

the island. Nick, keeping himself ready, finally said:

"All right. Let her coast!"

"Oke," Williams said.

THE motor was shut off. The plane drifted bumpily across the choppy water. Nick had the glasses to his eyes and watched steadily without speaking. It seemed to him that certain shadows, which he could only now and then catch, were the figures of men.

But now, to his profound amazement, a beaming white searchlight screamed silently up through the sky. A second, and then a third searchlight followed it. Nick put the glasses in his lap. Now he climbed back into the observor's seat in the Vought.

"Holy cripes!" Williams said.

"All at once the lights go on," said Nick.

"It's the McCoy, isn't it?"

"What do you think?"

"Yeah; it's a base, all right!"

Nick's blood was pumping hot. "You know what our next operation is, don't you?"

"Escape?" Williams asked.

"No. If you put the motor on now we're caught. *When* you put the motor on, I should say. Switch on the radio!"

"Oh! Sure!"

"They'll have a portable set over there, and they'll hear it," Nick said. "But we can't help that."

Williams had the radio on now. He was trying to raise the big Navy station at Guantanama Bay. He kept trying. Nick watched the shore.

"I've got through!" Williams whispered. "Give me the bearings!"

Nick read off their position as quickly as he could.

Williams transmitted it. Now he snapped off the radio, his head came up.

"How do we stand?"

"They're coming out after us!" Nick said. He was conscious that his voice was hollow.

With nervous fingers Williams got the motor going again. The trim ship pulled forward, began skipping over the swells. Waves splashed into the cockpit. Now the wings lifted it. Ten feet, then twenty, thirty. They were going up fast.

Nick watched behind them. He had thought it possible there might be one small chance for escape. But now a searchlight combed down from the sky. It roved the water where they had been. But it did a hell of a lot more than that, Nick thought. It outlined three roaring, low-flying Messerschmitts. They were speeding across the place where the Vought had lain in the water.

Nick did not know when the enemy had become aware of their presence. It was probably the sound of the motor that had attracted them—just before they had turned the motor off for the last time.

The Vought was rising, but the Messerschmitts spotted the plane and started chase.

"They're on our tail!" Nick said.

THE Vought was flying without lights, and now Williams banked it sharply in the wind. But it was futile. They were bathed in light from the island. The Messerschmitts were roaring fast behind them.

Now their guns opened up. They chewed angry red holes out of the night sky. Nick bit his lip, and cursed bitterly. The Vought could fire forward, or from either flank. But it could not fire from the rear. Bullets hummed over the cockpit. The screaming Messerschmitts came like charging stallions. You could see the swastikas, and the glassed-in cockpits. Their guns painted long yellow streaks toward the Vought. Nick could stand it no longer.

"Wheel around," he shouted. "We'll face the pigs!"

Lieutenant Williams nodded grimly. In the next moment the American ship was making a wide turn. It threw the Nazi planes off their angle. But the three of them, like crack, performing stunt planes, banked simultaneously, their wings tipping heavily starboard. It was as though they worked in a single unit.

Nick's hard-boned face was very white, his lips thin. His hand massaged the gun-lever. The muzzle spewed furious reprisal. Nick kept the gun going. He was cursing and talking all the time. He was calling them names, and shooting. All of the hatred he possessed, he was hurling through the night at them.

One of the Messerschmitts rose slightly, then came diving at them. Nick licked his lips. Through the goggles he watched, timed everything with exact precision, then jerked back the handle of the gun.

He felt the active weapon shaking under his grip. Then he saw the belly ripped out of the Nazi plane. He saw flames roar up around it. Only Williams' sharp left bank prevented a crash with the stricken ship. It wound down through the night, wrapped in gaudy flames, a swirling cone of fire rising from its descent.

But bullets were rattling a tattoo against the side of the Vought. Nick whirled the gun around. For a brief moment it was a ship-to-ship duel. It was a running battle.

Nick's noisy gun shattered the glass in the Messerschmitt cabin. Williams' gunned the Vought, and they turned, roaring up at the Nazi opponent. The frightened Nazi pilot whirled away so quickly that it sounded as if his wing were cracking. Again they had avoided collision by inches.

Nick observed this and sat coolly peppering at the plane. Now he shouted. A flame began licking along the side of it. He saw the Naxis struggling to bail out.

The remaining of the three Messerschmitts attacked them with blind, wild fury. Its pilot lost all sense of caution. It was probably, Nick thought, the first air battle of the war; and the German flyer was incensed beyond all reason at the prospect of a Nazi defeat. At any rate, the pilot literally flung his ship toward them.

Sweat dripped from Nick's face. For years he had been an expert gunman. But watching this ship rush toward them he knew what it was to look at death. He jerked his hand back. The gun roared in a spasm of fire.

But the Messerschmitt swerved away, and Nick's fire went wild. The Nazi ship veered off, in a short maneuver: now it swung back. Nick turned the guns on it. But to his sudden horror he was conscious that the Vought was losing altitude. Williams seemed limp in the cockpit. Nick saw blood on his face. One arm hung loosely over the side of the ship. They were plunging downward.

The lone Messerschmitt came winging after them, like a vicious hawk, his guns chattering.

"The hell with you!" Nick said.

HE AIMED at the diving wings. He ripped at the whirling nose of the vulture. He kept the gun going

until it suddenly stopped. He jerked it twice, but it didn't fire any more. Nick's cold hand released it. With a sick dread he turned to see the Nazi.

But the Messerschmitt was going around and around in a circle. The pilot had been hit. The plane kept going around, crazily. It was a queer, unearthly sight that chilled Nick's blood. But now his head nodded as his eyes followed it downward. He saw white parachutes open in the night sky. All of the three planes were gone.

"Cripes," Nick thought, and he began to tremble. "How'd we ever do it?"

In the cockpit Williams was shaking his head groggily. The Vought leveled off, now it began to climb. But Nick was convinced that Williams wasn't even conscious. He was flying from sheer instinct. It was the way a drunken man will drive a car.

The Vought kept going faster and faster, and the island disappeared. Nick looked down. Theirs was a seaplane, and they seemed to be flying over mountains. The Vought's speed was increasing. Wind howled through the wings. Faster . . . and faster the Vought went. Over mountain crags, and valleys.

"Hey," Nick said, "for God's sake—"

But Williams was conscious, after all. He was muttering something. His eyes were heavy-lidded under the goggles. His face was bloody.

"Short cut," he whispered hoarsely. Then there was the trace of a smile on his white face. "We're . . . going . . . home!"

Nick was there when Lieutenant Williams died. Williams was on a cot in the Red Cross tent, and an oil lamp burned dimly. An army doctor stood by wearing a fine khaki uniform. Williams' pretty young wife was beside the cot, sobbing. Outside, the rain dripped from the tent, and there was the far-off echo of boat whistles from the harbor. Williams' eyes were closed, and he was whispering through dry lips.

"Short cut," he said, and once again there was a wan smile on his tired face. "We're . . . going . . . home!"

He was dead then, and the doctor pulled a sheet up over his face. Nick went outside. Somebody told him war had been declared.

CHAPTER IX

BULLETIN: WAR

IN CRISTOBAL, searchlights combed the sky at right angles. From the streets it was possible to see the raider planes quite clearly. They were small, black shadows moving against a storm-washed ceiling.

The anti-aircraft guns set up a terrible din from every direction. They flashed orange-red, their explosions raucous and ear-splitting. People could not find air shelters and they ran in the streets screaming. The anti-air shrapnel began coming down like rain of iron, clonking dismally across roof tops, and on the cobblestones.

Men lay flat on their bellies in the gutter. Women stood against buildings, holding either arm stretched out to pin their children back. A dazed old man was staring up at the sky. Jeff saw a horse lying on its side, its blood streaming out. Somewhere a dog was yelping.

There was the crash of bombs and the slow, awful, splitting noise of buildings cracking in two. Debris littered the streets like trash. The anti-air guns kept up a thunder.

Jeff stood against a building, holding Kathie in his arms, doing what he could to protect her. Now he saw Yankee fighter planes taking the sky. But the bombers still came. Nazi fighters, flying low, engaged the Americans. It was the job of the fleet German fighter ships to prevent the heavy bombers from being attacked.

Vicious dog fights occurred everywhere. The staccato screech of sky guns sang shrilly into the din of noise. There was the low, throbbing whine of plane motors, now and then drowning out even the anti-aircraft guns. Jeff saw two planes falling, encased in flames. One was a bomber.

Tons of bombs still fell, exploding pitilessly. On the streets the confusion grew. A big black Panamanian was shouting: "Air shelter, this way!"—unaware that his wildly waving arm pointed only in the direction of a heap of smoking ruins.

A chalky-faced woman, in mad flight with two Filipinos, stopped and shook her fist at the sky. An old woman sat in the middle of the street, sobbing. Two goats had escaped someone's back yard and ran about aimlessly. A fat, linen-clad tourist rode past on a wobbly bicycle.

The entire scene was absurd, tragic, and horrible. Near the corner a man lay mashed beneath a ton of bricks, both his arms stretched out. People moved everywhere. And all the time, like the roll of a thousand giant drums, the anti-aircraft guns were going.

Incendiary bombs began to fall. Flame burst from various sections of town, lighting the gaudy sky. Suddenly the building Jeff stood against was hit. It shuddered, swayed. Jeff picked Kathie up in his arms and ran. The building crashed in the street behind him. Jeff crouched beside Kathie in a gutter. They stayed there until it was over.

THE manager of the hotel unlocked the door and Kathie followed Jeff into Nick's room. Jeff's uniform was muddy and smeared. There was an unshaven shadow on his jaw. His eyes were hot.

He sat down on the bed and picked up the phone. He jiggled it several minutes before anyone came on. Kathrine went into the dinky pantry and his eyes followed her. On the phone he was connected, after a long wait, with Captain Knight.

"Today's the day they give babies away," Captain Knight said.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I don't know. All my life I've said that whenever I was excited. We sail in three hours. The ship won't be ready before then. Be aboard, Jeff." The captain (it seemed to Jeff that he was incredibly cool) chuckled, and added: "If you're with a girl you'd better say your last goodbyes." His voice sobered. There was a long wait. "And Jeff?"

"Yes sir?"

"It's pretty rotten, you know. I never did get over for that glass of beer. So say goodbye to Cristobal for me, will you?"

"Aye, aye, sir," Jeff said.

"Good boy!"

Jeff hung up and sat there numbly. Kathie came

in with a cup of warmed-over coffee for him. It was very black and rank. The room seemed still, and outside there was no sound at all. Kathie was pale. Jeff sipped the coffee and she turned on the radio.

" . . . of crack flying squadrons successfully fought off all attempts to bomb the locks of the Panama Canal. Citizens of Cristobal, which fared less fortunately tonight, are warned that another raid is expected hourly. A large waterfront fire was started in Colon. And several tenements in Panama City were reduced to ruins."

"Oh, darling!"

"I love you, Kathie."

" . . . was also demolished in this, the first attack of the war in the Western Hemisphere. The declaration of the United States was automatic with the start of hostilities in United States territory . . ."

"What of Nick?"

"I don't know!"

"I've got to go pretty soon, Kathie."

"You'll be back, won't you?"

"Sure, I'll be back."

"Be careful. Oh, how silly! How can you be careful?"

"I'll be careful," he said. "It's you I'm sorry for. It'd been better if we hadn't met."

"Darling, don't say that!"

"It's true!"

"No it's not!"

"Seattle, Washington: Russian planes were sighted over the city, but no bombs were dropped. Tacoma: Russian aircraft was thrown back after an attempted raid on provision sheds and power plants near Puget Sound. Bremerton, Washington: Navy planes hurled back Russian bombers in a raid on the Bremerton Navy Yard."

"Maybe you could pretend we never met."

"I'm not very good at pretending," Kathie said.

"Bulletin: Tokyo, Japan: Japanese troops have been landed in the Philippines and have clashed with American land forces near Manila. Tokyo: American aircraft —believed to be bombers from the United States Base at Singapore—flew high over Tokyo tonight, but no bombs were reported dropped.

"Japanese military authorities announced that swift reprisals on a scale of twenty to one would be inflicted on American cities if any Japanese nationals are bombed in non-military cities and towns—such cities to be later designated by the Nippon government.

"Washington, D. C., by A. P.: The United States Pacific Fleet has steamed out of Guam. A large-scale naval battle is expected when the U. S. fleet meets the main fighting force of the Japanese Navy which is believed to be somewhere in the vicinity."

"It's like a nightmare," Kathie said.

"And yet we've always known it would come."

"Berlin, Germany: In reply to the United States declaration of war it was announced here tonight quote: 'War with the United States has never been the intention, or the end, desired by the Third Reich. It had been hoped until the last minute that agreement could be made regarding fair trade practice in South America, and the urgent problem of German-American minority groups residing in the United States. But if America wants war the Nazi iron fist will answer her blow for blow'. Unquote.

"Berlin, by United Press: The Bureau of Propaganda has issued the following statement quote: 'The United States alone is guilty of bringing about the recent horrible famine in Europe in which thousands of German-protected citizens met death in France, Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Since the beginning of the present government in Germany the United States has shown toward it a vicious, intolerable hatred.

" 'Germany can no longer close her eyes on the openly hostile attitude of the American government. This war has been thrust upon a Germany which wanted only peace! America has for years materially aided Germany's enemies! The Jew controlled capitalism in America has spread poisonous propaganda against the German people for which it must now pay!' Unquote.

"Rome, Italy: In answer to the United States declaration of war . . ."

CHAPTER X

SAIL AWAY TO SUICIDE

THE door opened, and Nick walked in. The leather jacket was slung over his arm. His face was white, lined, his eyes bloodshot. Kathie got up, and Jeff switched off the radio.

Nick greeted them with a tired, glad smile. He rubbed his hand down over his face and stuck a cigarette in his mouth. Kathie was telling him how worried they had been. Her words came in a rush of half-finished sentences, asking if he was all right; how he had fared. She wanted to know everything at once.

Then she warmed coffee over for him and Nick sat down and the three of them discussed the war. Their voices were soft, their observations casual. "Well, we're in it now," they said, and they spoke vaguely of the future. No one mentioned victory. Even to them it was a thing which seemed far away. Finally Nick said:

"All I really know is that I haven't slept for two days —and there's work to do." He swished what was left of the coffee around in the cup. "I've already been in touch with the Intelligence chief." He glanced over at Jeff and grinned. "You wouldn't know me, kid, but I've got a badge now. I'm in something known as the secret service." He paused. "You'll get your article, Kathie. But they'll probably censor the hell out of it."

The scene, somehow, for just a moment, Jeff thought, glowed with a sense of domestic serenity. Kathie was Jeff's girl, Nick was his friend. Jeff wished that the moment could be suspended in time: the intimate, sacred pleasure of having about you the two people you loved.

Jeff sat very still, as if he was afraid he might break the spell. With his thumbnail he aimlessly flaked off some of the mud that had dried on his uniform. It seemed good, too, to be away from the throbbing of Diesel engines.

"I see that you and Kathie met," Nick said.

"Yes, we met."

But Kathie was more thoughtful. She studied Nick's hard, creased face, and then she said slowly: "Darling, we have a surprise for you."

Nick looked up guilelessly.

"We're in love," Jeff said.

NICK looked from one to the other, then back again. His expression was only half-formed as though he expected them to say it was a joke.

"Kathie never falls in love with anybody," he said. "Not her. Kathie is—"

But his hollow words came to an abrupt end. He realized they were in deadly earnest. Kathie was looking at her polished nails. Nick stared at Jeff with hard, bitter eyes. Jeff was suddenly conscious of the situation and his cheeks flushed.

"Listen, Nick—"

"Save it!"

"But I—"

"Forget it!" Nick said. He rose. "You don't think *I* give a damn, do you? You're crazy if you think—" He broke off. "Hell, I'm a lot older than Kathie, anyway." He walked to the end of the room. "If I'd gotten married I'd have kids this high by now. . . . Well, what are you sitting there for? Why don't you say something?"

"Nick, I—"

"Listen, kid. This girl doesn't mean anything to me. What has she been telling you anyhow?" He turned his head. "What have you been telling him? She always left me in railroad stations, and on docks. I remember once in Cairo, Egypt, when—" he broke off again.

He sat down on the bed between the chairs in which Jeff and Kathie sat. He was talking fast, smiling, his words thick, sometimes blurred together. He slapped Jeff's knee.

"Listen, this is swell! You're the two luckiest people in the world! I want to be there when you get married. I'll have a bucket of rice, and—"

"Stop it," Kathie said.

"What?"

"I didn't know you still felt that way, Nick."

"What way?" And before she could reply: "I don't know what you're talking about!" His voice was almost shrill.

"I don't want to—hurt you, Nick, and—"

Jeff was trying to get a word in.

"Hurt who?" Nick said. "Who do you think you're hurting?" He glanced at Jeff. "She's a nice kid, but she's got one of these complexes women get that make them think every man in the world's in love with them."

He got up and walked into the pantry. He stayed in there a long time. He kept running water in the sink, and rattling dishes. When he came out he was smiling.

"Let's have a drink. I think the occasion calls for one." Then, because it seemed obvious that he was still talking about Kathie: "The United States doesn't get in a war every day, does it?"

Kathie laughed. "Gee, for a minute, Nick, I thought—"

"That's silly," Nick said. "It really is!"

Jeff was relieved. He watched Nick's bright expression and at last it seemed to him that such gaiety must be sincere. Nick had been rattled, that was all. He'd been up for two days. He was pouring drinks now, saying a lot of bright things, and Jeff noticed that his hand shook as if it had palsy.

THE streets were dark and empty, and the two of them, walking, did not speak. Here and there were piles of debris, and the shadow of distant fires flickered ruby-colored against the roof tops.

Jeff felt Kathie on his arm, and he was conscious of nothing else. They stopped at a small, dimly-lit all-night café and sipped cocktails. There was very little to say and after a while they walked again. Kathie was trembling, and he could feel her trembling.

As they neared Colon there were many sailors on the road, and once a company of soldiers marched past. Three streets away they heard the rumble of tanks and heavy artillery shifting in the night from one position to another. There was no blackout here and the street lamps still glowed. The air was wet and cold and it was nearly dawn.

There were marine sentries on the docks, and sailors, and a few women saying goodbyes. The sky was turning a dirty gray and all the people were like shadows. A fog was blowing from the harbor and the sound of ships' whistles was very clear. There was a silhouette of a warship moving past in the distance, and closer by a seagull flapped its wings. The voices all around them were low.

It was so near the time, now!

Kathie turned to Jeff and looked up into his face. She was very pale now, and dry-eyed. He was conscious that afterward the scent of her perfume would cling to him, and there would be powder on his lapel, and strands of red hair on his shoulder. He would remember a million fine things he should have said. But now he only kissed her lips and pressed her very close to him.

The *S-60's* whistle blasted, and Captain Knight's megaphoned voice echoed from the bridge: "Stand by to cast off!" He had discerned Jeff in the foreground. There was the throbbing sound of the engines. Kathie said something.

"What?"

"I said I'll be waiting for you, dear," Her voice was very small.

"Kathie—"

"Yes?"

"Some day there won't be any war! There won't be anything, see! There'll just be—you and me. Goodbye, Kathie—"

He kissed her hands, and then because this was pain and he could endure it no longer, he rushed off. He leaped to the submarine's deck. Lines were cast off. Jeff climbed the outside ladder up to the conning tower. The whistle shrieked, and then they were backing down.

This was it!

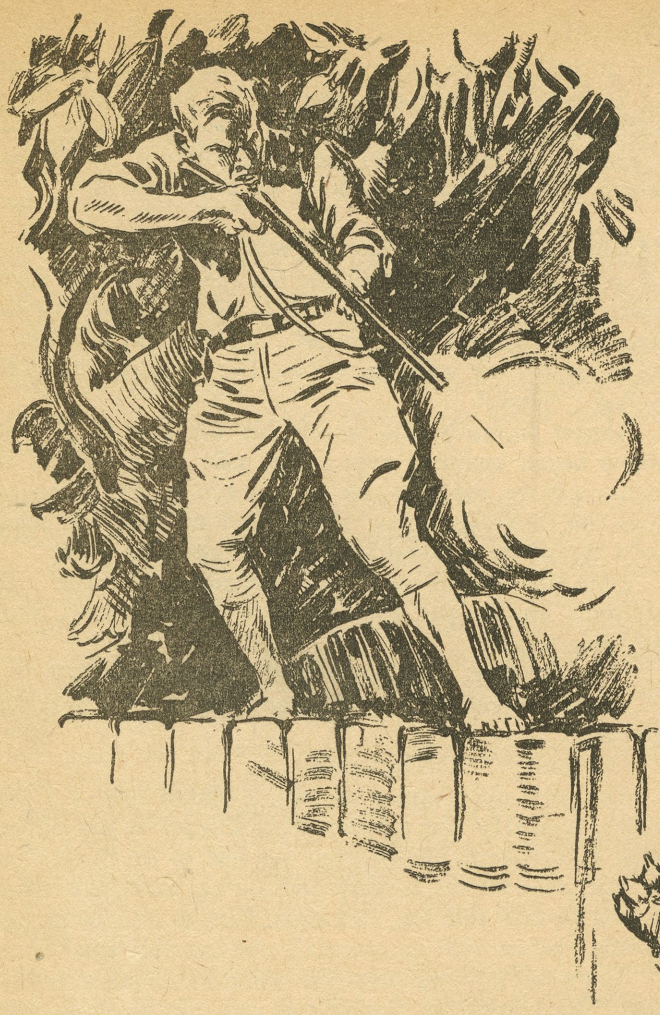
Jeff waved. Kathie held her hand to her face and she did not wave. It struck him all at once that she was crying. Overhead there was the sound of American planes. The captain gave his orders, and the ship began to swing around. Dawn was bleaching the dark sky. This was the farewell. Jeff's lips were mute. Already the smell of the ship was in his nostrils.

"This is the first day of the war," the captain said.

"Yes," Jeff said.

When he looked back Kathie was gone.

(To Be Continued Next Week)



McNally, I'm Afraid

By Richard Wormser

Author of "Detour, Mr. Darwin," "Elephants to Ride Upon," etc.

The black panther sprang, his head flattened like a cobra's. This was the last chance: McNally put a bullet down his throat

Shoot off a gun, and fifteen Patagonians go into a pyramid, with a blue-and-white polka-dot chin on top. That's better than marrying a million bucks —but you have to shoot your own panthers

I

THE plane cruised in wide circles, looking for a place to land. The owner-pilot had been complaining of a knock ever since they had left Santiago de Chile; from time to time he would race his motor, trying to unstick a gummy valve.

But, McNally thought glumly, it sounded as if the Chilean was anxious to dump his passengers and go home. Well, grief, you couldn't blame him; this was no place, as the saying goes, for a white man. That it was no place for an Indian, either, was historically shown by the fact that this island on the Forty-second Parallel South was the poorest in the world for museum diggings. There weren't even any animals, except a few mangy rodents.

Charming, charming, McNally thought, looking out the glass window of the fine plane. A wonderful way to make a living. Much easier than—say—going over Niagara Falls in a barrel every hour on the hour or wrestling with a fresh-caught gorilla on the old six-a-day circuit.

He had never done these things, but they would come, they would come. Show business was shot, the zoos were overstocked, and the movie audiences had decided they liked Disney's animals better than McNally's.

The pilot shut off his motor. "I think I see a field I

can land on," he said. "I'm going to try to do it now."

"Okay," McNally said.

"You have no fear?"

"What have I got to lose?" McNally asked. "Here goes nothing."

"And the *señora,* she has no fear?"

"She hasn't even got sense. Let's go, Captain."

"As you say, okay." The plane swooped down, making long easy spirals. The island below loomed larger; now you could see the desolate pine forests and the white, cold-looking breakers the Pacific threw up on the shore.

"Okay, okay," McNally muttered, falling back in his cushioned seat. His hands dropped lifeless at his sides; one of them fell on the ankle of Mrs. Raftery Cooper, and the plump woman woke up.

SHE hitched herself forward, until she was sitting next to McNally; she pressed the button that made a seat out of her bed. "I dreamed I was back in Winchester, Iowa," she said. "The mayor—he wanted to marry me once—was laughing at me."

"Yeah? I wish I was in the land of cotton," McNally said, leaning sidewise to look out the window again. The plane was low enough now so you couldn't see all of what the maps called Nameless Island. But you could see enough to know you didn't like it.

"I didn't know you were a Southerner, Mr. McNally," Mrs. Cooper said.

"Maybe I am," McNally told her. "I was born in a circus tent. The show was playing Augusta that week, but in the fuss over me, my old man forgot to write down whether it was Augusta, Georgia or Augusta, Maine. I had a time getting my first passport on account of that . . . Did you know we were landing?"

"No. What, landing?" She blocked the shatterproof window on her own side. "My, it doesn't look very pretty, does it? You know, back in Winchester, we always thought of cousin Lionel as living on a tropical island. Isn't it funny what mistakes you can make?"

"There's one sentiment I can agree with," McNally said. "Why this is as far south of the Equator as New York is north."

"Yes, but— Tell that man to put his hands on the wheel!"

McNally glanced forward. The pilot had let go of the controls to hold both his hands over his head and shake them, like a prize-fighter going into the ring. But he promptly grabbed the stick again.

"He's just wishing us luck," McNally said. "After all, he's going to try and land on an uncharted field in an uncharted land. He's a good pilot."

"Oh, McNally," she said, "you know everything, don't you? I can't think what I'd do without you."

The disgusted apprehension that rode Dave McNally boiled up. "Babe," he told the plump woman, "don't forget it's your cousin Lionel you've come down to marry."

Her unwrinkled, attractive face turned toward him, not understanding; tears welled in the eyes that thirty-five years had not dimmed.

McNally said: "Skip it. I'm in a bad humor." He patted her hand, and she smiled at him.

McNally used his extensive and polylingual vocabulary to swear at himself. This was all wrong. There were rules to this game, rules he had learned in fifteen years of animal and freak collecting; and one of the first rules was not to be too nice to any dames an expedition happened to include. Another rule was not to go on expeditions with dames; but that rule had gone overboard when business had fallen off to the point where it hadn't been worth while to leave New York for twelve months.

THE pilot threw up his left hand and cried: *"Ahora!"* and McNally automatically felt the clasp of his safety belt. All okay. He glanced over at his employer; her belt had been loosened for comfort. His big hands jerked it tight around her waist in one motion. *"Ahora,"* McNally yelled. "Now."

Almost instantly the wheels hit the ground and the plane began bumping over sandy soil; the pilot had the motor still on, ready to give her the gun in case of trouble, and the airstream threw sharp sand up over the plane, into the windows, scratching the unbreakable glass.

Then the brakes were set, the motor off; the plane swiveled around and stopped, nose into the wind, ready to leave again.

"Nice landing," McNally said. *"Bueno cogado."*

"Bueno cogado," the Chilean agreed. "I help you unload."

"No hurry," McNally said.

The pilot only looked at him, a glance full of amusement, sympathy and a dozen other things. It was obvious that this aviator, known from one end of the West Coast to the other for his bravery and daring, thought McNally a fool to take this job, this expedition to reunite an optimistic woman with an eccentric and possibly insane man.

There was nothing about the island to stimulate enthusiasm. Seen from the ground this way, the pines were far-spaced and shabby; the ground was sand where it wasn't pine needles. Maybe there was a better part to it elsewhere; it didn't look as if it would support much life. Even in the midsummer of January a chill wind blew off the Pacific, and whined in the aileron wires of the waiting plane.

The pilot and McNally unloaded the camping outfit quickly, the sleeping bags, the tent, the cases of canned goods and dried fruits, the many guns. Then the Chilean shook hands with McNally, and bowed politely to Mrs. Cooper, and stepped back into the plane.

For a moment his head was framed there, blue eyes questioning, red brows raised; then he slammed the door, and the self starter whirled the propeller. He gunned the motor, and the big ship went down the barren sands, and then rose, cleared the pine trees, and circled back. The pilot waggled his wings in farewell and was gone.

As he soared again, the sticky valve cleared itself and the miss went out of the motor; and McNally could picture the grin on the aviator's face. For some reason this increased the loneliness; McNally shook his head, and took a chew of tobacco.

Mrs. Raftery Cooper said: "Oh, Mr. McNally, I thought you chewed gum."

McNally got the quid comfortably into his cheek and spat. "Dirty habit," he said. "Gum-chewing."

"But I saw a picture of you in an ad, a testimonial—"

"Anything to turn an honest dollar," McNally muttered. He shook out a tarpaulin, laid it over the supplies. He kept out a shoulder pack for himself with two days' rations for two people, blankets, a gun. "I've got to peg this down. Looks like rain."

He walked to the edge of the clearing. Clearing? Most

likely badlands soil that had made this one space on the island where they had landed. Swinging at a pine, splitting pegs to tamp down the tarpaulin, he caught himself wishing that there had been no place to land, that they had had to turn back.

Which was rot, which was nuts. He got ten bucks a day and his expenses if they didn't find Lionel Raftery and bring him back; he got fifty grand if they did. Well, he wasn't in business for his health, was he? If he was just living to be living, he could stay in the States, take a room some place, and live on the income from what he'd banked. Not well, but three meals a day and a roof over his head.

HE SPAT tobacco juice on the pine stump and carried his armful of pegs back, banged them through the eyelets and into the ground with long sweeps of the axe. After the torpor his body had sunk into on the Panagra plane and then on the charter ship, the exercise had done him good, started the blood working through his system again; he was whistling as he finished, and began shouldering the pack.

"It must be hard to whistle with tobacco in your mouth," the woman said.

McNally looked straight at her. "I got rid of the cud," he said. "I only chew when I'm stalking, or when there's a fire hazard and I can't smoke. I was doing it then to annoy you. To—well, to prove I'm a man, I guess."

"But why?"

He snugged the pack down on his shoulders. It felt good there, though not familiar; he didn't often have to carry his own pack. He leaned on the barrel of his rifle. "This expedition," he said, "isn't much to my taste. I thought we'd get a couple of white Chilean guides at Santiago, a troop of Indians to carry stuff. An expedition. Not two people starting off on a desert island on a cockeyed, half-baked walking tour. Hand in hand, like the babes in the woods."

"Oh, I know," she said. "It can't be much fun for a famous man like you—a man who has been honored all over the world—to have no company but a fat old woman like me."

"Hey," he said. "Cut it out, will you? You're not old. You're a year younger than I am. Yeah, yeah, I know, a lady's age, only I've had to get your passport stamped, haven't I? Mrs. Cooper, it's not that. I like you fine—" He realized what he was saying, and broke off.

"Only—?"

He said, picking up the gun: "Only, I'm a wild-animal collector, not a lady's guide or a matrimonial bureau."

"But you're a man who makes money," she said. "You told me so. And Cousin Lionel and I will inherit a million dollars of Grandpa Raftery's money if we marry each other. Doesn't my wanting half a million dollars make sense to you?"

"Sure," he said. "Pick up that blanket roll, and let's go look for the other half million. Come on now," he told her, and then added: "babe."

Sure enough, this brought a smile to her round face, and it was on a pleasant enough note that they crossed the barren sands and struck off into the pine woods, south, in the direction where McNally had noted some small signs of habitation from the air.

But he couldn't shake off the feeling of trouble, though the woman was pleasant, though he had his gun, though he had told the pilot to be back in three days for them.

IT WAS easy enough going; there was no underbrush, just the straight, wide-spaced pines whose needles dropping had poisoned off all the grass, the shrubs that might have tripped a walking man. The needles were not thick on the sand; the way they piled up on the windward side of the trees showed why. But the ground was soft, too, and their feet made no noise as they hiked south. Noise would have been gratifying; the silence was ominous.

After awhile McNally heard the throb-throbbing of a motor some place; a one-lung motorboat, sounded like. He glanced out to sea, but the high breakers were uninhabited; he kept on walking. The motor got no louder, no softer; it kept on at the same pitch and intensity.

Finally he couldn't stand it any longer. He stopped walking. "You know whether Lionel Rafter's got a motorboat?"

The throbbing stopped. "No. He never writes—"

"Hey. That was you making that noise, wasn't it?"

"I—can't—get my breath."

"Well, babe. Lie down. Take it easy. This island's only sixteen miles long. We'll get there in plenty time."

Obediently, his client sank to the pine needles. McNally looked down at her, sadly. The round face was red and damp with sweat. He unslung his pack, and dropped it beside her, lifted her head with one hand, shoved the pack under with the other. "There, kid."

"Thank you, David."

"Don't call me that. Dave, or Mac. My first name's Davidoff, anyway."

"What? I thought you were an American."

McNally shook his head impatiently, sat down with his back against a pine trunk. He made himself a cigarette, lit it. "I'm American all right," he said. "My old lady was a highwire artist, with the Davidoff troupe. My old man had a liberty act, McNally's Arabians.

"American!" He laughed. "One of my ancestors got a letter from General Washington for making the soldiers laugh at Valley Forge. He'd been traveling with a dancing bear before the war started and he enlisted in the Continentals. Yeah, I'm American all right. The whole damn country's my home. Like I say, my passport reads Augusta because the circus wintered there; only I was born in the summer."

"You think of Augusta as your home?" the woman asked. She unlaced her high hiking boots and rubbed aching shins.

"I never had a home," McNally said, grinding a butt of his cigarette out in the sand. "My folks weren't that kind of circus people. Only the swells, the real nobs, get to winter in Augusta. My people hit the vaudeville time with a coupla horses and Mama's highwire . . . I dunno why I'm tellin' you all this," McNally said. "You can read it in any obituary in *Billboard*. All outdoor people are the same."

"Why, I think it's real interesting," Mrs. Cooper said. "I never even left Winchester until I was eighteen, and then it was to go to Des Moines with Mother to buy a dress for my graduation. My, you must have seen a lot."

"Yes, and it's all the same," McNally said. "I've as many friends in the Federated Malay States as I have in Connecticut. I've been in every country in Africa and Europe and Asia, and most of the countries in South America and Asia Minor. There isn't a hotel in Australia

where I couldn't cash a check on my signature. There isn't a major zoo or a three-elephant show in the world that doesn't have at least one animal I've captured for them. They can't put on a World's Fair without a McNally freak or an animal act. I've seen it all. I've done it all, and it's all the same," McNally said. "You better lace up them boots, babe. Let's get out of here."

"Why them boots, Dave?"

"All right, then, lady, those boots."

HER fingers were not plump; they were shapely and quick on the rawhide laces. She stood up, gracefully, and put out her hand to help him; he growled, and scrambled to his feet by himself.

After he had the pack on, he hefted his rifle. "All the same," he muttered. "And your damn fool cousin Lionel runs away from it to live in this hell-hole."

She started walking. "What is it, Dave? What is it that's just the same?"

He said: "The world, Mrs. Cooper. Mothers putting their babies to bed, guys tending their homes, and McNally looking for another animal to shove into a cage."

They went on, side by side under the gaunt pines. "Why do you call me Mrs. Cooper? My name's Irene, and you know it. Are you scared of me, Dave?"

He growled, and hauled out his plug of chewing tobacco. Then he thought better, and put it away again. "Oke, Irene," he said.

They kept on walking.

After the second halt, they found the island soil rising under their feet; rocks broke it here and there, and in the lee of the rocks, patches of soil had formed, there were clumps of bunch grass and even a few flowers. Irene Raftery picked one and put it in her hair; a blue flower. McNally growled again. Suddenly he raised his rifle and fired. The woman screamed.

At his leisure, McNally went forward and picked up the bird he had shot, the first living creature they had seen on the island. It was an ordinary sea-gull.

He looked at it casually, and then threw it away, in the pines.

Irene Cooper said: "Why did you do that?"

He shook his head. But it had been a demonstration. Not for her, but for the wild, the grim face he had seen peering at them from behind a tree. A face neither Caucasian nor Indian; the sort of face McNally had never seen before. It was gone now, but he remembered what it had looked like. Wild, bushy hair, staring brown eyes, bright yellow teeth displayed in a stretched out grin that was more of a wild snarl.

McNally said: "There are some sort of wild people on the island here."

"Natives?" Mrs. Cooper asked.

McNally said slowly: "I don't think so. The one I saw looked like a very large Australian bushman. That wouldn't be native, I'd think . . . We're only six hundred miles north of Patagonia, the Straits of Magellan. There are some wild and woolly folk in those parts."

"Is that why you fired?"

"Yeah. Show him I could hit what I aimed at. I'm glad now I've got the locks to the other guns in my pack, even if they are heavy. The wildest sort of savages know how to use a gun these days."

She said: "Why didn't you tell me right away?"

"Didn't want you looking at him. Let's go as far as we can before we have to have a showdown with them, if any. Maybe it won't happen; don't get scared yet. I get along okay with wild men. We talk to each other and swap cigarettes."

"I'm not scared, Dave."

THE ground kept on rising; now there were a few stunted bushes, of the creosote-greasewood variety. The pines fell away, and that was funny; pines usually do better on high ground. McNally felt himself walking straighter, more alert.

Irene Raftery Cooper said: "What is it? You can tell something's about to happen, can't you?"

McNally said: "No. But this vegetation, and the soil —it's not what ought to be here, at all."

"No?"

"We're on the Forty-second Parallel," McNally said. "South. And that's a lot colder than the same line north, on account of the Gulf Stream, and some other things I won't go into now. And things are beginning to get a tropic— Well, by Darwin, Mendel and the Royal Geographic Society, will you look at that?"

They had come to the top of a sandy, shallow ridge. Now, stretching below them was a cup-shaped valley, or meadow or flat. Where, on the north side of the ridge, the ground had been poor and sparsely covered, here, ahead of them, all was green grass and big, park-like trees. *"Quercus lobata,"* McNally muttered. *"Swietenia mahogani!"*

"What?" The woman giggled, uncertainly. "Or should I ask?"

"Eucalyptus globulus Labillardiere," McNally said. "Huh? Oh, I was just identifying the trees."

"Oh."

"None of which," the man said, "oughta be here. One of 'em's tropical, two of 'em sub-tropical. This island is temperate, verging on antarctic almost, and—"

From the nearest clump of *quercus*—liveoak—something emerged, fast. McNally threw the gun to his shoulder and held it steady. "Wild boar," he said. "It hasn't got any right here; but then, neither have the trees. Sometimes they charge."

The blue, thin animal halted fifty yards away, pawed at the ground with a sharp hoof. The dust that it threw up was black, rich; not sandy at all.

"Why, Mr. McNally," Mrs. Cooper said. "It's got a ring in its nose. It must—"

The hog got on its hind legs and gravely walked back into the clump of oaks. McNally put his gun down on the ground and sat next to it, leaning back against his pack. He wiped his brow, thoroughly. He said, after a while: "I'm not going to ask you if you saw it. If you didn't, that's your good luck."

"Why, that wasn't anything," the lady said. "My grandpa had a whole farmful of animals that could walk on their hind legs. My grandpa Raftery that left us all this money."

"Yeah?" The circus man sat up abruptly. "The devil you say! Why, an act like that would be worth a fortune."

"The cows looked awfully funny," Mrs. Cooper said. "But grandpa wouldn't let them go in a circus. He wouldn't even take them to the county fair. He said it made animals unhappy to have people stare at them."

"And this guy left a million dollars?"

"They struck natural gas on his farm. He left five

million; four to the University of Iowa for veterinary research, and the other million to Lionel and me, if we would marry each other. He believed cousins ought to marry, when they are descended from a brilliant man like Grandpa."

"Yeah, sure." McNally stared at the cold sky, the sub-tropical earth. "The Mendelian theory, I suppose."

"That's right," the lady said. "When I married George Cooper, it just broke Grandpa all up. Sometimes I think he poisoned George. But, of course, it isn't as if Lionel and I were real first cousins; our fathers were just half-brothers. Grandpa was married several times."

BUT a dreamy look had come over McNally's face. "I don't mind," he said. "All the time this happens to me, but I don't mind. I've been in a screwy business all my life, and it gets no more sane as I get along. You're no more nuts than most people who go on trips with me. Only screwballs, it seems, want to go on expeditions. Or at least, with me. Maybe I'm the one who's nuts; who can tell. I go on more expeditions than anybody else."

"Dave. Do you feel all right?"

"Just dandy, Sugar. Just wonderful. It is your theory that your Cousin Lionel trained that wild boar to walk on his hind legs?"

"Of course."

"But why?"

"Why did you go all the way to Africa to bring back a gorilla that did magic tricks? Or to Siam for a cat-quartet? Or to—"

"You win," McNally said. "Let's go look for Cousin Lionel. I am strangely interested in meeting the gent."

"He'll want to meet you, too," Irene said. "On account of Grandpa we Rafterys read all the animal news in the papers. So we've all heard of you, Mr. McNally—Dave. You're the best in the world."

"No," McNally said. "No. Let's hike." He hoisted his pack up again, got a firm grip on the rifle; they marched on.

The feel of the calves of his legs, rather than any marked changes in the sky-line, told McNally they were going steadily down hill; the wind disappeared, and it got hot. He loosed his collar, muttering. Any cup, of course, would serve as protection against the gales that prevailed all year on this coast; but just getting out of the wind wouldn't account for the increasing heat. Irene had slipped out of the leather windbreaker she'd been wearing, was trailing it from her hand, holding it awkwardly off the ground.

He took it from her and slung it up on his back to rest on the pack. She said: "Don't do that, Dave; you're carrying enough now."

"G'wan, babe." He felt good to be doing something for her; a feeling that disturbed him. Well, she was a nice dame, easy to get along with. Not any too bright, but not goofy, exactly.

"Do you inherit any of your grandfather's animal training ability?"

"Just a little," she said. "I had a pair of poodles once that liked to play a music box I had made for them. They were right cute; I made a little treadmill, and Pootsie would run in it, going fast when the music was *allegro*, and slow when it was *andante*. While she was doing that, Wootsie would play the pedals, you know, loud and soft. It was right pretty."

"Yeah? How's this about not wanting your animals stared at?"

"Oh, I think that's silly," Irene said, hurrying a little to keep alongside McNally, staring up at his face with her big blue eyes. "I wouldn't mind sending my animals to zoos and circuses . . . What I've always wanted to do, is settle down on Grandpa's farm and raise real fine animals for the shows. Chimps and trained goats, and everything. There's a fine house on the place, with a big living room and a fireplace and everything; and a hot-house. You could have your own vegetables all year round, and your own chickens, and—"

"Boy, it sounds good to me," McNally said.

"Really? Why, I should think a famous man like you, a man with friends in every part of the world, would hate to settle down."

He said: "No. Hey, we'll rest; I'm going to change my shirt anyway." He slipped out of the pack, and she dropped down to put her head against it. McNally pulled the arctic shirt over his head, folded it. The temperature was now pushing ninety, he thought; he took handkerchiefs and tied them to the shoulders of his athletic shirt, to rest the pack.

He took out cigarettes, threw one down to the girl, lit up. He stood there puffing, looking down; her eyes were big, her face gentle; and if she was a little plump, it made her more—well, homelike, friendly.

HE SAID: "No itching foot left on me. Oh, I like people. I'm a friendly guy. But a farm like that, that's what I've always wanted. I'm not discontented with my work," McNally said. "Animals and show business, they're what I've always liked, and I still like them. But the fighting with natives, the tramping through jungles, the thirsting on deserts and the arguing with local stupid officials—I've had enough . . ."

Something buzzed near his ear. He smiled a little, and said: "Like that."

"Like what?" Irene asked. "I'm rested. Shall we go on?"

"Not yet," McNally said, squatting on his heels. "Lying on the deck of some filthy copra schooner, now, trying to sleep with the thermometer at a hundred and twenty at midnight. That's all right when you're young. But when you get to the years where you have a little sense—I'm thirty-six—you want to settle down. The friends I've made—sultans, ambassadors, elephant-drivers, and guys who keep pawnshops in the back alleys of Singapore and Harbin—a lot of 'em come to the States every so often. A big home and a pleasant, sweet wife, now to make 'em—"

"Why, Dave," Irene said. She started to rise. "You sweet old—"

He caught her by the shoulders, pushed her back against the pack. "Stay down!" he said.

"Dave!" She put her hands on his shoulders. "You—"

"Those savages or whatever they are have been shooting at us with bows and arrows for five minutes," McNally said. "You don't wanta get up till they run out of arrows. They can't hit us here, on account of we're protected by the fall of the land."

The lady gasped. "And you just went on talking."

"I tell you they can't hit us. I don't think they've shot at many things in their lives or they'd know that."

Now you could hear the almost constant buzzing in the air. McNally picked up his hat, tossed it into the air; an arrow nailed it. "They're good enough shots," he said.

"Funny that they don't understand we're defiladed here."

"My, you're wonderful," he said.

"Yeah?" Kneeling on the ground next to her, he bent over, looked down at her. "You think so? Don't confuse experience with courage. I got a lot of the first."

"You know," she said, "for a minute there I thought, Dave, you were—well—talking about me."

"Huh?" He was genuinely confused.

"My farm. Me. When you were talking about settling down—"

There were a lot of things on his mind. The short, narrow berths of freighters. The rotten food of jungle-porters. Thirst and weariness, and heat and cold. And then, the fact that business had gone down the spout. The long months of idleness in a hotel room in New York.

And this face was close to his, and he was a man who was not afraid of women; a man who seldom stayed in one place long enough to have suffered many consequences.

In a word, he kissed her.

She returned the kiss, saying: "Oh, Dave, now we—"

Then the savages charged.

III

THEY were a weird-looking crew as they came over the crest and ran on down toward the white people. In color they were not Negroid and not Indian; they were a dullish sort of steel gray, that part of them that was not covered with some of the finest war-painting McNally had ever seen.

Yellow foreheads were being worn by the Nameless Islanders that season; and bright pink cheekbones. Around the mouth and chin, a little more latitude was allowed. There were green chins and black chins, dead-white chins and even—but they were running fact, and a man couldn't be sure—even one polka-dotted chin in navy blue and white.

"And I haven't had a drink all day," McNally muttered.

He was standing now, and the woman was crouched at his feet, whimpering a little with fear. But McNally was bold as a lion, because there was nothing to be afraid of; these comic-opera savages were charging with practically no weapons. Each man held a long wooden arrow in each hand, but they didn't even have shields or moreover spears. As for guns . . .

McNally let them come on. They were whooping now, in high-pitched, wild voices.

He let them cover half of the hundred yards from the crest; three-quarters; he let them get within fifty feet of him before he threw up his gun, took no aim at all; and fired over their heads.

Instead of fleeing as he had expected, they halted; they grouped; they formed—and then they went into a pyramid, eight understanders rising to a single top-mounter. The top-mounter was the guy in the polka dot chin.

It was a pretty effect in pigmentation and choregraphy; but it was not functional. As a method of making a living, defending a tribe from its enemies, or doing anything else that a savage tribe ought to have to do to stay alive, it lacked effectiveness.

McNally kept the gun in his hand, but he lowered it. He said: "Mrs. Cooper, I'm afraid your cousin has blown his top." He licked his lips. There was a funny taste on them; good jolly, lipstick. Then he recalled what had happened just before the charge. He did not feel so good.

But he shook his head. He said: "I wonder how long those Arabs can hold that?"

"Arabs?"

"All acrobats are Arabs. Hi, Raftery! Raftery!"

There was no answer.

"Raftery!" McNally bawled. "C'mon down there or I'll shoot your top-mounter!"

There was still no answer. McNally raised his rifle. He brought it to bear, slowly, pointing it at that blue-and-white dotted chin. "Here I go," McNally yelled. "I'm not fooling. A good top-mounter's hard to come by, Raftery."

He meant it, too. His heart was breaking in him at the thought of the act he was wrecking; but fun is fun, and McNally had had enough. These savages did not respond to any known system, and he was afraid that when the understanders got tired and the pyramid broke, he would have to fight all fifteen of them.

He tightened his finger on the trigger, and the sight was filled with white polka dots on a navy blue background.

A whistle blew, and the pyramid came down as neatly as it had gone up. The savages stood there, bowing with false stage grins, their eyes furious.

McNally lowered the sights, but he kept them on the top-mounter. "Come on, Raftery. Come see your pretty cousin."

A high shrill voice cried: "If you shoot that man, I'll—I'll kill you." And Lionel Raftery came hopping over the crest on pipe-stem legs.

HE WAS a man of about fifty, with the thin build and sloping paunch not unknown at that age. He sported a gray, dirty-looking goatee, and he was wearing a gabardine suit. "Put that gun down, will you?"

"You come stand where I can put my hands on you and I will," McNally said, grimly.

The little man came trotting around his bowing line of acrobats, and stood next to McNally. McNally lowered the rifle, and put a big hand on the older man's shoulder. "Get rid of your troupe there. Then say hello to your cousin."

Lionel blew his silver ringmaster's whistle again. The savages melted back over the hill. "Hello, Cousin Irene," Lionel Raftery said. "How's George?"

"He died," Irene said. "So did Grandpa, Cousin Lionel. Just last year."

"Too bad, too bad," the shrill man said cheerfully. "And this is McNally, I'm afraid."

"Huh? You been expecting me?" McNally let his weight rest on the rifle barrel.

"Oh, yes. I've heard about you, McNally. How you go around the world getting acts for circuses. Well, you don't get mine, even if my very own cousin did betray me and bring you here."

"Forget it, little fellow," McNally said. "Acrobats are a dime a dozen. The public won't even look at 'em free at the county fairs any more."

"Acrobats?" Lionel Raftery squealed in anguish. "Acrobats? I've got a complete circus. I've got an educated pig act, and a liberty pony act, and I've got the best blinking trained seals in the world." He was nearly crying now. "I've even got a penguin aquacade, and I'll bet you never saw that!"

"No," McNally said. "Never. It's all right. I'd like to see that. A penguin aquacade." His eyes were hot and

bright. Boy. Show business had never gotten into a bad enough slump—and never would—so that a penguin aquacade would not sell for a tidy little sum. If there had been a cable office handy he would have wired his agent, Jake Loeb, to start dickering now. But—

"That isn't what we're here for," McNally said. Then, after a moment, he asked: "Great King-penguins or the little Viceroys?"

"Great Kings," Raftery said, belligerently. "But you don't get them. When I was a little boy, I said when I grew up I'd have a whole circus with no one else in the audience but me, and I've got it and you aren't going to take it away."

"No, Lionel," Irene said. "Now you know you can't stand excitement, Cousin Lionel."

McNALLY said: "That's right. We're not here to look for acts. We're here to get you to marry Irene. I get fifty grand if you do, and if you know about me, which you seem to, you have some idea of what I'll do for fifty thousand dollars."

"But I don't want to marry Irene. I don't want to marry anyone. I'm not interested in that sort of thing."

McNally bit his lip to suppress a smile. "I suppose not. But I don't see that it makes any difference. That lady wants to marry you. For fifty grand, I'm a guy that likes to see that ladies get their way. Now, Lionel—"

The little man squealed again, hopping up and down. "Go away. Go home! You can't do that to me. This is my island and—"

"Listen," McNally said. "Stop screeching. That dumb-act there is getting restless and I don't want to fight any acrobats today. Shoot off your cap pistol, or blow your whistle, or do whatever you have to do to send them back to their tent, will you?"

"And then you'll—"

"Where's that top-mounter, Irene?" McNally asked. "With the polka-dot chin? Oh, yeah, I see him." He hefted the rifle.

Little Lionel sighed and blew his silver whistle. "All out," he cried. "Pull 'er down, boys!"

The savages faded over the crest again.

McNally said: "Nice discipline. You're a good showman, Cousin Lionel."

"You think so?" The little man danced with pleasure. Then his eyes got wary again. "Don't think you can flatter me, now, McNally, into taking my show back to the United States."

"Listen, brother," McNally said. "You been gone a long time. Your circus probably couldn't even show to the charity wards at the hospitals. Show business has made strides while you've been hiding here. But it doesn't matter. We're here to get you to marry your cousin, and that's all. Let's go to your house, if you've got one."

"I bunk down in the privilege wagon," the little man said.

"Complete circus, huh? Say, Lionel, what do you do about having shills and dips in your sideshow if you're the barker, ringmaster and the whole audience?"

"I haven't worked that out yet." Lionel led the way over the crest from which the dumb act had charged.

A wave of hot air—no longer warm, but steaming hot, miserably hot—hit them as they stepped over the ridge. And the foliage changed again. Though it had been bleakly temperate at their landing place, California-subtropical a few moments before, it was now wildly, luxuriantly tropical. Monkeys swung among the Spanish moss in the live-oak trees, a parrot flashed, screaming across the sky; the ground underneath was soft and soggy and steaming; and brilliantly-colored, fragile flowers grew everywhere.

"Hot springs," McNally said.

"You've guessed it," Lionel cried. "A tropical paradise on parallel forty-three south. Isn't it wonderful?"

"It's hot stuff all right," McNally said.

"And I'm the only man who knows about it," Lionel said.

"How about your acrobats, your roustabouts and so on?"

"Patagonians," Lionel said, triumphantly. "Stupid, ignorant men from the south. They think I'm a magician for making it so warm. They'd been landing on this island for years, but they'd never penetrated to Raftery's Hollow here, and they didn't dream it was warm here. Anyway, they don't like it warm, much. They're so used to freezing all the time they think it's immoral to be comfortable. But they're afraid to run away; they're scared of me because they think I made the hot springs."

"I can see that," McNally said. "Patagonians aren't the brightest people in the world."

He knew about Patagonians; big men, the only native tribe of really tall men in the Western Hemisphere. Big and dumb and half frozen all the time, and vicious. Ships going ashore in the Straits of Magellan had suffered at their hands for three, four hundred years. Theoretically they were subject to Chile and the Argentine; the two big republics had divided Patagonia some time in the late nineteenth century, and then had done very little about ruling it; it wasn't worth much.

The Patagonians had war-boats, canoes, and traveled up the coast a few hundred miles, and sometimes down the coast to the Antarctic to stare at Byrd; a worthless race.

NOW they came to a tightly built fence of bamboo laid vertically and carefully tied in place. The door was locked with a modern, Connecticut padlock; Lionel opened it. "I'd better put my troupe away," he said. He blew his whistle. "I never use the gun except for the act," he said, touching the blank-cartridge pistol on his belt.

He seemed happy now, pleased to be showing his pitch to a fellow-showman, and one that he admired. Irene, unnaturally for her, had been quiet a long time.

The whistle brought the dumb troupe around them in a body; laughing and shouting at each other, they ran through the door. Lionel bowed, and his visitors preceded him into the stockade. He closed the door and snapped the padlock on the inside. "They'd get out and freeze themselves to death if I'd let them," he said. "You see, I took their clothes away, thinking it would make them stay here. But they'd go over to the cold part of the island if I didn't watch them. Now—"

He led the way through an arbor over which orchids and vines grew in such profusion that they shut out the sun. The smell of sulphur was coming into the air.

They came out of the arbor and crossed a bridge over a sulphur hot spring. "There are five hot springs," Lionel said. "Two sulphur and three clear. I think one of the clear has radium in it. It doesn't matter. . . Now, this is my big cat tent."

He had stretched canvas, though it seemed silly in a circus that never went any place. In good stout cages he

had a lion, a lioness, a pair of tigers, a black panther. They were none of them very good specimens.

They went through another door into a clearing with a plain hot spring making the air steamy. "Monkeys," Lionel said.

He was right. Pretty near every specimen of monkey known to man was caged there. Rhesus monkeys, spider monkeys, baboons, orangs, chimps. Marmosets. Howlers. Ghosts and lemurs. Mandrills.

"Only the chimps are trained," Lionel said. "Of course."

"Where's your gorillas?" McNally asked.

Lionel looked at him suspiciously. "Gorillas? I haven't any. You know, the only time a gorilla was ever in a circus was when Ringling got John Martin, and he died—"

"Ringling's has two gorillas now," McNally said. "Mr. and Mrs. Gargantua."

"Oh. Well, I'll send away . . ." But there wasn't much conviction in Lionel Raftery's voice. "Now you'd like to see—"

"I've seen enough," McNally said. "A circus isn't any news to me, brother. No gorilla, huh? Look, where do Irene and I stay?" He yawned.

The little man hopped up and down. "Well . . . Come this way." He led them through another arbor, and through two locked doors. "These will be the elephant trainer's quarters," he said. "The bull boss and—"

"Will be, eh?" McNally shook his head. "No bulls?"

"I told you that. You can have circuses without bulls. You can—"

"Yeah, but can you get anybody to look at it? You better give us a chance to wash up now. Maybe we'll take a look at your show later," McNally said. "After I've rested."

THE PLACE he left them in was comfortable enough; canvas, but the roof pitched high with a venthole to let the heat out. A huge jacarinda tree, brilliantly covered with red flowers, shaded the tent. There was a partition down the middle, with a canvas door.

McNally dumped the contents of his pack, expertly sorted Irene's stuff from his and tossed it through the door. "That's your room. You don't mind staying with me, babe? I thought it was better. That guy's nuts."

"Oh, Dave—"

"Hey, toots, you aren't gonna cry? He's pleasantly nuts." McNally laughed. "That was a fine line I handed him about the gorilla, wasn't it?"

"I didn't understand, Dave. It seemed cruel. He was so proud of his circus, and you—"

McNally said: "You're paying me if I get him to leave this island long enough to marry you in front of an American consul. To get a guy from where he is to where you want him to be, you have to promise him something he wants. Like putting food into a cage to make a wild animal go in. Well, the gorilla's the food, the bananas, the beefsteak, the nuts if you want. Get out of here. I'm tired."

"But, Dave—"

"Yeah?"

"I thought it was all off. I thought I wasn't going to marry Cousin—"

"What gave you that dopey idea?"

"I thought you and I—"

"Oh." McNally laughed. "You hired me to corral this guy for you. If you just wanted a husband, I could have gotten you one in the States for a lot less than fifty thousand dollars. You want your grandpa's million dollars, or don't you?"

"Yes. I suppose so. Dave, I'm not exactly poor now. I've got the farm, and about a hundred thousand dollars in bonds. And I've got—"

McNally shook his head. "I told you something about my life," he said. "Do you think anyone who's had it as hard as I have could pass up a half a million?"

"You mean marry Cousin Lionel, split the money with him and then get divorced? Oh, Dave. You're so tough, so hard-boiled—"

"We're not exactly engaged, toots. Now, scram. I've got some thinking to do."

IV

HE MADE a mat of the blanket he had brought for himself, and sat down on it. This was screwy, but a lot of the world was, and it didn't bother him. And—well, after all, what had Lionel Raftery done? By accident—shipwreck or sailor's yarn—he had found a tropical hideout where none should be, and—a man with a little money—had retired to it with a bunch of animals and some canvas and built himself a circus. What was wrong with that?

What was different about it? McNally on a farm in Iowa was just as silly sounding as this Iowan on Nameless Island.

Of course, the troupe of Patagonians was a little goofy, but it was no goofier than a troupe of South Boston tumblers, Arabian tumblers, or any other kind of tumblers. All acrobats were screwy, probably the Patagonians no more than others; they were maybe better off, since they hadn't had any brains to start with.

And the dame, the—

McNally cursed himself. Everything he had ever wanted—money, a comfortable wife, a home—was in his grasp. All. And he couldn't keep his mind on it. He couldn't get his mind off the attraction Lionel Raftery had mentioned. The penguin aquacade. He could picture it. He had caught penguins in his time; not with pleasure, since he had had chronic malaria since he was twenty, and the Antarctic brought it on badly. He knew penguins, their flashy dives, their show-off tricks, their natural trouping instincts. An aquacade—

But the natural sequence of thought had reminded him of his malaria. He had gotten it, not in the tropics, not in Africa or Asia, but in Arkansas, down in the swamp lands. Trying to get the old McPherson outfit out of a mudhole.

The bright flames of old-time naphtha flares, the harsh yells of the razorbacks, the squeak and groan of a wagon trace as an elephant took hold, all this came back to him. And McNally twenty, and general manager of the show.

There had been a blonde trapeze artist with that outfit. Vera, Velma? It didn't matter. He could remember riding with her in the paywagon, after he'd demudded the show, his head in her muscular lap while she made Russian tea for him. They'd drunk it with rum, and he'd told her she reminded him of his mother.

But the best dame he'd ever had was a White Russian in Harbin, when he got the panda. She'd been a spy for Chiang and for the Japs at the same time, and she'd picked up with McNally because she thought he was a Russian agent, and she wanted a job with them, too.

He began to chuckle, sitting cross-legged on his blanket. Time to quit, McNally. Show business is shot, and travel's blown up higher than a kite, and you'll end up as a white-helmeted guide for millionaires on safari. Not that they weren't good guys, too, but not for McNally.

No, not that stuff.

Iowa. He had played Des Moines, and a town called Davenport, and something or other Bluffs, and Dubuque. Or was Dubuque in Illinois? He ought to know about these things. He had acts out on the county and state fair circuits now, but Jake Loeb took care of the booking. For a percentage, for a percentage.

Jake would be sore when he found there were to be no more percentages. If McNally was going to home all the time, he could handle his own business. Iowa was just a few hours from New York by plane. . . .

But he had been in New York for a year, just before this trip, and he didn't even know the routings of his own acts. Hell of a business man.

Still, only suckers passed up a fortune. And he would get a fortune for just going through with what he was hired for. It required no pressure, no promotion on his part, to collect afterward; no dame would stay married to Lionel Raftery by choice. And *this* dame thought McNally was wonderful.

McNally shook his head. He stood up, got his rifle, and went out into the steamy sunlight.

OVERHEAD the stormy clouds moved north in the cold sky; down here it was as warm as man could want it. A cat roared. Tiger? No, it sounded more like the cry of the black panther. McNally turned away from the direction. That was the yell of a big cat who sees other big cats getting fed and is impatient; he was not interested in watching a bunch of lions eat.

The other way opened to a compound he had not seen yet. He went in there.

A pony pulled its head up from oats and whickered, went on eating. Stock tent. Mr. Raftery had made nice enough stalls for his ponies; McNally inspected the reinforced bamboo boxes with pleasure. As for the ponies, they were all right. Nothing fancy. The usual island pony found on most of the East Coast of the Americas, from Virginia south. Descendants of Spanish horses that had swum ashore from wrecks and been jettisoned from sea battles in the Caribbean, was the theory. Inbreeding makes horses into ponies; from the Shetland Islands to Haiti that was true.

I could write books about animals. I could have me a desk overlooking the pasture and I could write me a book. Yah, you illiterate ape.

McNally looked at the paddock tack, and went on through another door. He nearly fell into a pool.

This paddock was all water. Just a narrow walk, really only a catway, around the edge. A bridge led to an island in the middle of the pool; there were some little houses on its rocky slope. McNally walked out there, and he found his heart was beating fast.

The island was covered with penguins; not the little penguins, but the big, King-penguins. They were showy enough in their white vests and black backs. But would they work? McNally spat for luck, and raised his gun. He pointed it in the air, and squeezed the trigger.

He was nearly knocked off the rock in the rush. Penguins appeared from every place and no place; penguins popped out of the houses, penuins sprouted from the cracks in the rocks, penguins broke the surface of the pool, boiling.

Before he had time to reload his rifle, the penguins were neatly lined up, half at each end of the pool. They waited.

McNally frowned, hoping there were no further signals to give. He remembered the poor, tubercular magician who had trained Thurston the Gorilla with a mouth organ. Poor old Thurston. He hated the one-night stands they had him on now. . . .

But these birds had been trained as a straight liberty act. The four corner penguins started the show; they swam to the middle of the pool, making clean diagonal lines on the surface, met, surface dived, and returned to their corners. As they touched the wedges, the whole troupe dove, and the two straight lines ploughed toward each other, churning the water.

At the middle, the south line dove under the north line, and everybody kept on going. Now the south line was standing on the north wall, and vice versa. Then that diagonal meeting of the end-men again, and now they were all in the water, circling.

Billy Rose had done no better, and some of his girls had been to college.

Feet together, webbed toes out of the water, circles of penguins lay on their backs and paddled slowly, wheel-fashion. McNally swallowed, convulsively.

Then a whistle blew, and the act broke up abruptly.

Lionel Raftery stood there in the door, with his silver whistle still in his mouth. "Been watching the penguins?" he asked. "Aren't they something? Aren't they magnificent, Mr. McNally Aren't they?"

McNally looked at the sky. "Huh? Oh, the penguins. I'm afraid I scared them. There was a hawk flying around up there, and I took a shot at him. And all the penguins started swimming around. I hope I didn't put them off their feed."

"A shot is the signal for the act," Raftery said, indignantly. "They were performing."

"Oh, were they?" McNally asked. "Looked just like a bunch of penguins swimming to me. Say, do you play the mouth organ?"

"No. Why should I—"

"Oh, the guy that trained my gorilla used a mouth organ to give the monk cues. It's a good way of training animals if you're cut off from a calliope. . . . I wish that hawk would come back."

"Hawk? I've never seen a hawk over here."

McNally lowered his gun, and looked down. "Yeah? Maybe it was a tern. I don't care much about birds. I'm a showman." Without another look at the outraged Raftery, McNally walked off the island, and out of the corral.

Back he went, toward the paddock where he and Mrs. Cooper were supposed to bunk down. He found it, or thought he had, but when he put his hand on the door it would not open; the stout bamboo door was padlocked on the other side. Must have picked the wrong corral; must have gotten lost . . .

The panther screamed again, from the other side of the wall. Yeah, that must be the cats' compound. McNally turned on his booted heel, and started in the other direction.

He reached the other edge when a lion roared; not behind him but ahead! He was about to walk into the

lions' department, and yet the black panther was behind him in—

He ran now, back to the door he had just tried. "Irene!" he yelled. "You in there?" The cat screamed again. He had been right the first time; it was the noise of a big cat seeing meat and not getting it.

He raised his gun, and pounded with the butt on the polished canes. They gave, slightly, but they didn't break. They wouldn't, either; McNally had built doors like this himself to hold in wild animals in Singapore and Africa and Asia.

He backed off, and made a run at the wall, trying to run up it. But it was nine feet tall, and he had on boots; he went unheroically on his face. His hunting knife ripped the bootlaces, and in his bare feet he tried again. No soap; his fingers nearly touched the top, but the gun swinging from its sling on his shoulder got in his way.

His breath caught sobbing in his throat as he made his third try; the cat screamed again, but the blood was pounding his ears so that he could hardly hear. He flung himself at the wall, this time with his beltknife out and raised; but he didn't try to climb. Instead he used all his strength to plunge the knife into the wall halfway up. It caught there, sunk up to the hilt.

That was a hand-hold; and desperation helped some. McNally finally—half scrambling, half climbing, and all crazy mad with determination—got a hand on the top of the wall; then he was up on it, hauling his gun around.

No wonder the woman hadn't answered; she was inside the hut. The filmsy door, so unlike the compound walls, was closed; and on the roof was the black panther: a maddened, hungry piece of snarling muscle, digging frantically at the thatch.

One paw disappeared now, as the cat made a hole he could get his front leg into; then the head. McNally fired, not trying to kill the animal, because there was no vital spot offered; just trying to stop it. Blood welled red on the glossy black hide, just forward of the kidneys; the cat turned, and with what looked like insolent grace, licked the wound. Then both his front paws clawed out, tore at the thatch again; reeds and leaves flew through the air. McNally fired a second time.

THIS red spot appeared on the shoulder; and it seemed to enrage the cat. He leaped off the roof, snarling, head flattened down like a cobra's. Thin sunlight painted him as he crouched on the dusty ground; then he leaped and did it without warning.

Those white fangs, that red throat looked as big as the Holland tunnel as the cat flew through the air at McNally on the wall. McNally fired a third shot; he had once more to go before the clip would be empty. He put the bullet straight down the panther's throat; but the beast kept on coming through the air. A nine-foot wall is nothing to a panther.

McNally kept the gun steady on him; squeezed the trigger when the cat was halfway off the round coming toward him. He never knew whether it was that shot or the other before it that stopped the black cat; the beast died in midair, his claws taking the cloth off McNally's unbooted shin as he fell to the ground.

McNally let the empty rifle fall beside the cat, and held himself poised on the wall for a minute with shaking, sweaty hands. Then he dropped down, too.

He reloaded the gun before he walked slowly across the compound to the hut. "All right, Irene," he said. "It's dead."

He leaned on the rifle, waiting till she opened the door. "Oh, Dave," she sobbed, as she faced him. "You—" Then a scream. "You're wounded."

He grinned down at his leg, and was surprised that he could grin. "That's nothing at all. Cats' claws are usually clean."

"No, your shoulder."

He clapped his hand to it. "Hell!" An arrow had gone under his armpit, scratched his chest, was sticking out in front. "Good thing I'd put my coat on before I went visiting," McNally said. "Somebody doesn't like us here."

"Oh, Dave!"

He kept his eyes on her. "Babe, walk slowly back into the hut. Don't look up. That troupe of ornate Patagonians are all around the compound wall with their little old bows and arrows."

"How do you know? You haven't looked."

"Like I said walking up here, things are always the same. They've got us pretty as a mousetrap. You to bait the panther, and the panther to bait me, and now we're both in here."

"But before, when we first got here, why didn't they—"

McNally said: "Your cousin Lionel. See? A showman. He wanted the great McNally to tell him what a good circus he had"—McNally gently urged her into the hut ahead of him—"before he gave me the works, the old one-two."

McNally shut the door of the hut behind him. He pulled the woman to the floor. "Don't know whether arrows will break this or not. . . . This is my fault in a way." He took off his bandolier-belt, counted cartridges. "I was being a business man. I was running his penguin show down, trying to get him to swap for a sort of second-hand gorilla I own. If I'd praised him, we could maybe have had time for a getaway."

"Oh. You're so cool."

"This is my business," McNally said. "And I've got forty-eight bullets and there's only about twenty Patagonians. It's a good thing I brought the other gunbolts with me; they could have gone back and gotten the guns I left with the baggage and—"

A noise from the woman behind him made him stop. He looked up from arranging his cartridges on the blanket. "They came and got the gunbolts?"

She nodded, her fingers pressed to her mouth. "Cousin Lionel said—"

"It doesn't matter," McNally said. "It's always like this. People dumb enough to hire me are dumb enough to do anything. I was just going to wound those acrobats; now I may have to kill them. I guess I'll reconnoiter."

She whispered, breathless:

"Oh, Dave, I'm afraid."

"Don't be, babe; McNally's here. And McNally doesn't get his fifty grand till he gets you and your screwball cousin to Santiago; though I'm afraid you'll have to marry him in the hoosegow or the nut house."

"Here goes nothing," said McNally, and leaped for the bamboo ceiling rafters. He chinned himself slowly, and looked through the hole in the roof the cat had made. "Yeah. They already got the guns. Things happen fast on this island." He dropped back down.

"Babe, go get our blankets and sleeping bags. I got a plan."

V

THIS was McNally. A bunch of savages screaming and yelling, and him in a filmsy bamboo hut, with one gun and a handful of shells. It was amazing how much better he felt; he no longer had to make up his mind about what to do. His job was plain and simple, and he was no longer afraid. But there was no use telling that to Irene; she'd think he was boasting.

He grabbed the bamboo beam again, and hoisted himself up on it. It creaked and groaned under his weight, and it made slippery lying, even with one foot out on the next beam. "Hurry it up, toots."

The woman, struggling across the room with the blanket rolls, panted. Her face when she looked up at him was round and red and foolish; it was ridiculous to think that, he, McNally, had ever kissed it. "Shut up and shove those blankets up to me."

He used his knife to punch holes through a doubled-up blanket, and bound it around one beam with his shoelace. When it was fastened on the next one, it made a good-enough shelf from which to work; he cross-braced it with another blanket, spaced out wider to tie to four beams, cutting the hems off the blankets for tie-strings. "Now."

The ceiling beams groaned a little under Mrs. Cooper's weight, but when he had her up there he made her lie flat and distribute her weight as widely as possible. Standing on the blanket rolls, he could get his head out through the hole in the thatch. He brought the rifle up, and waited.

He had a fair shot at a Patagonian mug on the east wall, but that wasn't what he was here for. He let the savage fly at him with an arrow, and ducked just enough and just in time. Now more faces showed up. McNally kept his rifle low.

When he counted fifteen faces on the wall—the whole acrobatic troupe—the arrows were getting too hot for him. He brought up his rifle, as if getting ready to shoot; he let them see it. A sixteenth face, that of Lionel Raftery showed; but when the little man saw the gun, he ducked to safety again, his goatee waggling.

McNally took careful aim, and fired over the bushy heads. As the explosion died away, he could hear Raftery yelling at his acrobats; but McNally didn't know the tongue, and he couldn't tell from the tone whether Raftery was merely telling him not to do their acrobatic act—though a gun had gone off—or whether he was urging them to kill the intruders.

At any rate, they re-formed at the wall, and now they were getting their range; the arrows began flicking the thatch. McNally suddenly let out a death-curdling scream, and dropped down beside Irene Cooper.

"Mr. McNally. Are you—"

"Just call me Dave. No, I'm all right. Look, it's your turn now. Just take the gun and get up there—see, it's an automatic with four shots—and let them fly. Over the heads of those apes, though; don't try and hit them."

"But—"

"You wanta get out of here, don't you? Do like I say."

"Yes, Dave."

"When your gun's empty, drop it, throw up your hands and scream. Like you've been hit. Then drop down here, and we'll play puppies-in-the-hay."

"What?"

"Skip it. Just do like I say."

HE LAY on his back, watching Irene Cooper perform. It was hard to see her face, but he imagined it looked convincing; terrified, incompetent. That's what he wanted. The whistling song of the arrows told him Lionel Raftery had no intention of sparing his cousin.

"Ooohhhhhh!" screamed Irene Cooper, and dropped. McNally put an arm around her shoulders and held her to him. He reloaded the rifle.

"What are you going to do?" the woman asked. "You've got enough bullets there to kill them all. Why don't you—"

"Their reaction time is poor," McNally said. "Look, all I wanted to find out is how many men Raftery's got. He's just got that one troupe; they must double as razorbacks and managerie hands. But their reaction time is surprisingly poor," Mr. McNally said again. "I'm surprised they'd ever make acrobats."

"I don't understand what reaction time has to do with—"

"Skip it."

They lay there in their little loft; and after a while the singing arrows stopped. There was silence, broken when Irene said: "Do you think—"

"No more than I have to. From now on, babe, keep quiet. No matter what happens, keep still. Here's my boot, with the rest of the cartridges in it. When I start working, you swing with it."

"At what?"

"You'll see."

No use in telling her now; she would just get more and more jittery.

Time passed slowly. There was a lot of silence, and then less of it as the inner door to the compound was opened, and bare Patagonian feet shuffled around in the dust. Then the sound of boots, scuff-scuffling. That would be Raftery, inspecting his poor black panther.

McNally had time to be sorry about the cat before Raftery's voice was raised in some sort of command. Now. Oh now—

The door to the hut was forced with a blow, and Patagonians rushed in. McNally counted them: five, six—Now there were more, but they were milling around, and it was impossible to be sure he wasn't counting the same men twice.

But when Raftery appeared in the door, he knew that they were all in; the little screwball always seemed to stay behind his savages.

"Clonk them," McNally whispered, and reached out with the rifle butt. He caught Raftery square in the forehead on his first swing, and knocked him out into the dust; the man, falling, pulled the door shut. "Home run," McNally whispered, and got to work on the bushy heads so invitingly below him.

It was good fun. As McNally had said, the Patagonian reaction time to new things was slow; everything they had done proved it. And it was slow now. Attacked in a small room, no man looks at the ceiling immediately; he had time to down seven or eight before the first one peered up. And that was a mistake for the first one, because Irene Cooper—no fast thinker herself—had gotten the idea by then, and the heel of McNally's boot, weighted with the cartridges, caught that unfortunate in the chin.

A quick arc of the rifle butt caught three more; and the rest broke up and tried to get out. McNally had to jump for them to keep them captive; he used his fist on the last two, hefted the rifle, and walked out into the sun. Raftery

had his hands up, and tears were streaming down his silly, senile face.

McNally tied him up and went back to lace up the acrobats.

TWO DAYS later, McNally shivered in the thin sunlight of the northern end of the island, waiting for the pilot to come back. Near him, Irene Cooper fed black coffee to her cousin; rawhide strips held the little man's hands together.

In the sky, the noise of the plane grew louder and louder. McNally sat impassive, nursing his gun.

The plane circled once and landed. The dashing young Chilean captain leapt out. "So, *señor*. You are ready?"

"I'm not going," McNally said gloomily. "But here's a cable I want you to send, and here's a letter to Commodore Magreno, of the Trabuco Lines. He'll send for me in a freighter."

"There is room for all three." The captain's eyes were bright with curiosity.

"Take the other two," McNally said. "And deliver those messages. The cable is to my agent for money to pay the Trabuco Line for the freighter. . . Irene, it's up to you from now on. If you can persuade that little screwball to marry you, send a check for fifty grand to me to the office in New York."

"But—"

"Drop me a postcard from time to time, anyway," McNally said. "I'd like to know how you make out."

"But—"

"You think I'm going to leave here without those penguins, you're crazy. And anyway, I'm going back and talk to that dumb-act of Lionel's. Mebbe I can line them up to work for me, now their boss is gone. That's why I wouldn't shoot them, sister. They're not a bad act at all, and I hated to break them up."

McNally stood up, heaved his gun to his back. "They're all yours, skipper. *Buenos cogados.*"

"*Si,*" said the Chilean.

"But Dave," Irene said.

"I'm not ready to settle down yet, sister."

"Those Patagonians will kill you. You've hit them and stolen their boss and—"

McNally started walking away. "Oh, I can handle them. I get along fine with savages. I kid them and give them cigarettes. I'll bet they've never had a cigarette. Your fiancé there doesn't smoke."

He turned his back, and started walking away. As he walked, he experimented with the whistle he had robbed Raftery of; he would need it soon, because at last he was going to get to see the whole of the penguin aquacade.

He wondered how soon the freighter could come for him.

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Mrs. Wildcat's Millions

She was sure doin' an admirable piece of work with that hatpin

By Tom Curry

Author of "Meet Mrs. Wildcat," etc.

So it's ho for the great Western spaces where a two-hatpin woman is the best man in town, and a white-striped pussy makes a darn good realtor

THIS TROUBLE hit Pecosville all at once. Not that it surprised me much, for things had been running too smooth for the Pink Kitten Bar and Grill, Mrs. Priscilla Ware, Prop., and I knowed it couldn't last. The first whiff of worry come one evening when in strolls a tall, dark and handsome dude with a right pretty blonde dangling on one sleeve.

"How do you do, sir?" he greets me real polite. "Do you know where my sister and me could get rooms for the night?"

"Why, shore," I tell him from behind my bar. "Right here."

"Is the proprietress in?"

"Oh, Mrs Ware," I sing out as the Boss strolls from the restaurant into the bar.

We were jammed with the cowboy trade from Texas ranches for two hundred miles around. The Pink Kitten gets most all the trade around. Outside is a sign with a pink cat on it, and another that orders, "Wipe Your Boots, Boys!" Other snappy ones is tacked to the wall—"If You Can't Wash Your Neck, The Bartender Will Do It For You." "You May Not Be A Lady But The Waitress Is." These restrictions may seem a little hamperin' to some of the boys but they put up with it on account Mrs. Ware's palate-teasin' eats.

Mrs. Ware comes over at my call. The boys give the blonde the interested eye but for my money the Boss is worth a dozen of this type female. O' course, she's a little bit hefty side and maybe her chin ain't quite the kind that's built for chuckin', but she is a fine woman with high principles and a will of iron and the way she can rake off a man's hide when she's riled, is real inspirin' to listen to.

The dude fingers his elegant necktie, bows to the Boss, and he wrinkles his close-clipped black mustache and replies, displayin' an imposin' outlay of gold dental work. "My name's Thompson, J. Orville Thompson."

I didn't figger the Boss would go for that stuff, but she tossed him a smile that gives me a searin' pang—and not from the pork pie I eat for supper either: it was jealousy. Thompson was a gent from his shiny toes to his patent-leather hair. And when he says, "This is my sister Janice, Mrs. Ware," I lost all hope. He wasn't even hitched, thinks I. He was handsome as a two-year-old pinto and a couple of the waitresses was already staring at him from the doorway and giggling.

Thompson is lookin' at the bar and takin' in the pink curtains, the red bows tied on the cuspidors and the cupids painted around the edges of the bar mirrors. "It's a most unusual place, madam. I have done a great deal of traveling but I have never seen a barroom like this one. Business looks good, too."

"Rip-roarin', hi-tailin' and snortin'," the Boss tells him simply.

Then Thompson says, "This is just the sort of investment I'm looking for, Mrs. Ware. I'll give you a thousand dollars for an option and when my experts have made a full audit, I'll buy the place."

"Not this place, Mr. Thompson. 'Tain't for sale."

"A half interest then."

"Nope. I'm all set here, Thompson, and I don't need a partner any more than I do an extra neck."

Thompson's mustache twitches. "Business is business, madam, you understand that. I could set up another res-

taurant here and ruin your trade." You can see Thompson's a gent that don't take kindly to not gettin' his own way.

Mrs. Ware ain't got what you'd call a sleepin' temper, either. And the threat in Thompson's words had put a burr under her saddle.

"I don't skeer easy, Thompson," she snaps.

"I see," says Thompson in a voice that's colder than the Boss's beer. "In that case, I may be forced to take—ah, certain steps."

"Help yourself," says the Boss. "Just so's you head for the door, I'll be satisfied."

Thompson turns a shade redder.

Mrs. Ware always totes a hogleg in plain sight, but the bullets in it are blanks. She fancies a hatpin more than a six-shooter and with her aim it's almost as lethal and twice as painful. As for me, I got a sandbag handy under the bar and this I casually pick up.

If Thompson meant to start trouble, he changes his mind, and backs for the exit.

"Very well, madam," says Thompson, "but you'll hear from me again."

"That'll be nice," says Mrs. Ware. "But I won't hold my breath until I do."

Thompson oozes for the door, and when she makes a quick start his way, like she was comin' after him, he zips out in a flash, the blonde at his heels.

WELL, it ain't more than two weeks before Thompson opens his Jimdandy right next the Pink Kitten. This riles me and I decide to step over. I can see that his pretty sister is sitting in the window, as cashier, smiling at the passing gents. And there's no denyin' that along certain lines, she has considerable more appeal than Mrs. Ware.

And if that ain't unfair competition, I don't know what is. I point this out to Thompson and one word leads to another and first thing I know, I'm taking a pass at him across the bar. He ducks, and up pops a great big galoot who outweighs me by a hundred pounds and looks more like a grizzly than a man.

This monster vaults the bar, gets me around the waist and lifts me clear of the sawdust. Being a bouncer myself, I got to give Thompson's man credit for a neat professional job. I couldn't have tossed out trouble any better than Al done, even to that last twirl as he let go that sent me sailin' across the sidewalk and clean over the hitch-rail into the gutter.

Depressed, I get up and stroll back to the Pink Kitten, and am buckling on my gunbelt when Mrs. Ware comes on me.

"Where you think *you're* goin', Slim?" she demands.

"To gun a skunk," I reply.

"Oh, yeah? Which skunk?"

"J. Orville Thompson. He's opened a hashhouse right next door."

She steps out and takes in Thompson's new-painted sign. "Well, dawggone his dirty hide, he done it," she says.

Just then a bunch of cowboys from the Cross 3 gallops into town, whooping it up and shooting their guns into the air for fun. They were regular customers of ours but when they see the new place and the flashy blonde smiling at 'em, the donkeys slide off their leather and go into Thompson's.

"Cowboys're fickle," remarks Mrs. Ware, gloomily. "However, Thompson can never match my cookin'. And I'll hire a couple more pretty waitresses. We can hold out, Slim." She eyes me sternly. "Put up that hogleg. If there's any fightin' to be done, *I'll* do it."

Well, this cutthroat competition from Thompson was no joke. The next afternoon, seein' as we still had a few loyal customers, he pastes a big sign on his window saying, "Free Whisky To All!"

And the Pink Kitten got so empty it echoed. The only man we had had left was Sheriff Tad Kingsley, who is lovesick about the Boss. The crowds from the ranches and the loafers in Pecosville jammed into the Jimdandy.

"He must be losin' money hand over fist. He can't last," Mrs. Ware keeps saying, but she's plenty worried.

At the same time, there is something going on in town, something underground that we can feel but can't put a hand on.

SEVERAL days of this begun to get on our nerves. Then comes the strange behavior of John Q. Norton, our most prominent and only banker. It didn't seem to be hooked to the Thompson business but it was.

Norton flashes into the Pink Kitten one night, and slides to a stop in the sawdust, craning his long neck around. I was glad to see him—and that shows how lonely the place was.

"Howdy, Norton," says I. "What'll it be?"

"Sarsaparilla, Slim," says he.

I'd forgot it for the moment; he don't drink whiskey, scared if he did he might ask some woman to marry him. Norton is tall, thin and well-fossilized. A confirmed bachelor, he is always patting his spine at having escaped the halter and sneering at them as has to report regular and explain where was they all this time?

He has wrinkles around his eyes from figuring how to make four dollars out of one.

"Missus Ware in, Slim?"

"Yeah. Out back," I tell him, and ring a bell.

The Boss strolls up and nods to Norton. "Howdy, John."

"I'm sorry to see how your bus'ness has fallen off," Norton begins. "That Jimdandy place has ruint it."

"Cowboys're ornery," she tells him as she had me, "but they'll be back. Thompson can't keep givin' away free likker and he can't come near my cookin'."

I slid down the bar a bit but the place bein' empty, I could hear every word they said.

"You know the bank holds a mortgage on this property," Norton says and I begin to feel worried.

"Yeah? What of it? The interest's paid for six months. You worried 'bout your money? You can't even start foreclosure till next fall and I could pay up now if I had to."

"No, no. No offense," says Norton anxious-like. Then he gives her a smile that makes her blink and staggers me back against the whiskey bottle shelf. "Do you mind if I call you Priscilla?" he bleats.

"Yes, I do," snaps Mrs. Ware. "In the first place I never did like the name, it's sissified. And in the second, why should you suddenly get familiar?"

For a second I was jealous; I have asked the Boss to marry me but she always says no, she won't take a chance on having her heart busted again by twelve jesters who don't know murder from honest, boyish fun, she having been widowed by a Kansas hanging jury.

Norton gives her a look like a dyin' cow and tries to take her hand. If I hadn't knowed the old coot for twenty years I'd have said he was makin' faces to scare her but decided he must have been out eating loco weed.

"Will you marry me, Priscilla?" he blurts.

"Well I'll be dawggoned! So that's what's eating you," she gasps.

I couldn't believe my ears. Norton had spent all his time eluding females and here he was, popping the question to the Boss.

"You old fool," the Boss says, finding her tongue. "You go home and sleep it off."

Norton begs and pleads to no avail and when he sees the Boss reaching for her hatpin, he finally leaves.

"Did you hear what I did, Slim?" asks the Boss, after he has gone. He lives right next door in a square frame house with a fake second-story front where he has dwelt for thirty years. The Pink Kitten takes up a lot of land, spread out with the bar and chowhouse, and living quarters for Mrs. Ware and the help. The earth is sandy in Pecosville and we got no cellars, the buildings stand on thick logs drove into the dirt. Usually the space under the floors is closed off by lattice-work sections, so the air can draught under in the summer.

"Yes 'm. Couldn't help it," I reply, in answer to the Boss's query.

"The world's shore turnin' out crazy. Thompson hornin' in on us and givin' likker away free, and now Norton askin' me to hitch up with him!"

It was around midnight; we could hear through the open windows the yells and hurdy-gurdy going on in Thompson's Jimdandy. The Boss yawns and says, "We might as well close up, Slim. No customers."

Just then there begins the most horrible yiping and barking you ever heard in all your life.

"That's Ethel," the Boss remarks. "She's excited about something."

I sniffed. "I kin make one guess what that fool dawg's barkin' at, Boss!"

Then she got it. "A polecat!" she gasps. "Horrors! Go out and pacify her, Slim. Ethel's awful fond o' them."

So I light up a lantern and go out in the back yard.

THIS Ethel is a combination of various canines and I think maybe with a little coyote as well. She is bony and rangy through the body, covered with fuzzy mustard-colored hair that sticks out in every direction.

Her tail is very long and has clumps of silky hair hanging from it like an Injun feather pennant. However, it's Ethel's head that always astounds me. It runs back without a break from her nose to where her neck joins her shoulders. There's some sheep fuzz sticking up between her eyes but no bone bump where her brain ought to be and most of the time she acts like she hasn't got any.

Still, Ethel is the most good-natured dog I ever met up with, and Mrs. Ware wouldn't think of parting with her, the Boss being soft-hearted about critters.

There are lots of polecats in Texas, two-legged as well as four; hardly a woodshed doesn't have a family living under it. And Ethel's chief occupation in life was chasing them. She sorta specialized in them.

When I got outside the smell of excited polecat was so strong I choked. It was just as good, I figured, that we had no customers; and I hoped maybe the breeze would waft the smell into the Jimdandy.

"Ethel!" I howl.

I could hear her barking, she was beneath the building. Pretty soon I found a fresh-scratched hole where Ethel had squeezed in under a rear lattice section.

She was shore excited and she wouldn't come out. I put the lantern on the ground, kneeling by the hole and cursing her, while the fool rushed back and forth, pretending she couldn't find the exit.

"You better crawl under there and fetch her out, Slim!" said the Boss, from in back of me.

I swore—and for once Mrs. Ware don't slap me down for it. I found a shovel in the tool-shed and widened the hole. Ethel was over on the north side and I had to creep on hands and knees through spider webs, almost done in by the odor of skunk, and my ears shrieking with Ethel's shrill yips.

The dirt was mucky, my knees sank in squashy ground. I grabbed Ethel by the scruff and I yanked her out. She yelped as I shoved her from under the house and the Boss says, "Keerful, Slim, you're hurtin' her."

"I oughta skin her alive," I growled, trying to brush off my white shirt and apron. "That dawg jist can't learn to leave polecats alone. My clothes're ruint."

"You'll hafta tie her up behind the woodshed for a few days, I reckon," remarks Mrs. Ware. "That polecat's got a den under the house; must be what I heard a few nights back scratchin' under there." Then she steps closer and asks, "What's that all over your apron and shirt, Slim?"

I been trying to brush off this damp, gooey stuff but it only smears and Mrs. Ware held up the lantern, examining it.

"Good gravy, Slim," she gasps, "Ethel's struck oil!"

SHE was right; and it took me a while to realize what it meant. "No wonder that old goat asked me to marry him," she goes on, grabbing up the lantern. "C'mon, I'm goin' under."

I had to widen the hole some for her to squeeze through but under we go, accompanied by Ethel, who's delighted that we have at last seen her point and are joining in wholehearted-like.

It was clammy and I won't try to tell how it smelled under there, but the Boss bravely crawls over. And shore enough, the sandy earth is sopping with petroleum which it sucks up like blotting paper does water.

"We're millionaires, Boss!"

"Sh!" she warns, "somebuddy'll hear you, Slim! C'mon, we got to keep this quiet and think it over."

Out we go, and I fill up the hole and smooth off the dirt, this being fairly easy because it's sandy and shifty. Then I tied Ethel behind the woodshed with a length of clothesline.

We go inside, and pouring ourselves three fingers of rye, start gloating.

"This explains Norton's funny behavior, Slim," declares the Boss. "That oil is seepin' through the sand and runnin' down the slope into his yard. He musta found some. The avaricious old coot has been takin' options all over town, I'll bet. There's millions in this. And my land's right in the center of it all!"

"Still and all," says I, "we could do with more, Boss. When it leaks out, acreage here 'll be wuth its weight in gold. I hate to think that sidewinder J. Orville Thompson'll clean up along with us."

"He don't own that property, he only leases it. Though I heard it said he had a three-year rental on it, that'll be wuth plenty."

She was busy with her thoughts, and I kept my mouth shut while she moodily turns her glass in her hand, one foot on the rail. Finally she says, "Go spruce up, Slim. We're goin' next door. It's only fair if I try to even things up with Thompson. He done me a dirty trick cuttin' in on me."

Half an hour later, the Jimdandy was still full of cowboys drinkin' and eyein' Miss Thompson. The Boss, wearing a chastened look and a fancy pink dress with high boots on her feet and her gunbelt off—though she had her hatpin hid in her waist—steps into the Jimdandy, our rival.

There's immediate tension. Some timid hombres sort of sidle to one side ready to dive out the windows or duck behind the bar in case the Boss is on the warpath. Others grin and wait for the fun to start.

Janice Thompson turns red in the face and blinks very nervous-like while J. Orville himself, slouched behind one end of the bar, smoking a black cigar, straightens up and gives a quick look to make sure Al, his behemoth bouncer, is close at hand.

A sort of strained silence falls over the Jimdandy as the Boss stalks up the center and straight to Thompson. She puts both hands in plain sight on the bar and says,

"Thompson, I'd like a word with you, private."

Al was scowling my way but I tried to look uninterested. I had left off my cartridge belt though, without the Boss knowing, I'd hid out a six-gun in my shirt.

Thompson shrugs. "Very well, madam. Come into my office."

They go to the rear, me trailing the Boss as her bodyguard, and Al walking along behind the bar, watching me all the time.

J. Orville escorts Mrs. Ware into his private office, and they shut the door, though this don't mean much as the wood's thin as paper and there's a wide crack underneath. I stand at one side, leaning against the wall, and Al stands at the other, us dog-eying each other.

"Looka here, Thompson," I hear the Boss begin, in an injured voice full of female unhappiness, and I admire the quality of her acting. "You've got me beat. You've took all my trade and I can't hold out long."

Thompson gives a pleased chuckle and I wanted to get him by the throat and make him pay for the trouble he'd caused us.

"Tough luck, Mrs. Ware," he crows. "Business is business, and I offered you a chance to go in with me. I'm willing to buy you out at a reasonable sum, even now, though your place isn't worth what it was. What'll you take?"

"Aw, now, Thompson," says the Boss, her voice dripping with ladylike woe, "I'm a pore widow woman and this is the onliest way I savvy to keep the coyotes from my door. You're givin' likker away free now—losin' money hand over fist, just to ruin my trade. Runnin' a bar in Texas ain't an easy way to make a livin', you'll find that out after you been at it a while. I'll tell you what: I got eleven thousand dollars saved up and I'll give it to you if you'll close up the Jimdandy and sign your lease over to me."

Thompson guffaws like an amused horse. My fists clenched and I scowled, taking a step for the door, but Al lunged in ahead of me and got a hold on my throat.

"I'll rip your gullet out," he snarls.

"Keep away, you prehistoric ape," I growl, "or I'll insult the air by lettin' it through you!"

"You and who else?" asks Al.

"Me and Colonel Colt's little boy," I tell him and for the first time he realizes I got my six-gun in his brisket.

THOMPSON opens the door and sticks out his patent-leather head. "Shut up, the both of you," he snaps. "We're trying to talk business in here."

"Put up that gun, Slim," calls the Boss.

So we backed off from each other and the talk goes on inside the office.

"Tell you what," Thompson says, "I'll give *you* five thousand cash for an option on *your* saloon."

My heart hit my spurs. I figured Thompson must have found out about the oil. "Maybe he knowed it all along," I thought.

"Shucks," Mrs. Ware replies. "I couldn't see the Pink Kitten took over by a stranger. Why, it's like a baby to me, I love it."

They chew the fat back and forth, the Boss laying on the sob stuff. Finally Thompson says, "All right, Mrs. Ware, tell you what. I wanted you all along in the business, your cooking's too good to let slide and this one-horse place won't hold my interest long, I mean to start a whole chain of bars and eating-houses throughout Texas. I'll sell you half my interest in the Jimdandy for your money with a gentleman's agreement that if we clear over five thousand apiece the first year, you will sell me half the Pink Kitten for the same price. Is it a deal?"

"It's a deal," the Boss agrees.

She comes out, looking crestfallen for the benefit of Thompson, and we return to the Pink Kitten. She grins and winks at me. "I got half of the option, anyways, Slim."

"Yeah, but what about yore agreein' to give him half the Pink Kitten here?" I ask.

"Shucks," she replied, "In the fust place, Slim, I'm no gentleman, I'm a lady; and in the other, I'll have sold this shebang for a million dollars and cleaned up plenty on my half of the Jimdandy lease long before a year's gone by."

We had the oil fever, all right. "We better get some sleep," the Boss says. "Tomorrer we'll sign up Thompson and then I'll see how much more land I can buy in town."

First thing in the morning we take George Shooks, our attorney, to the Jimdandy and get Thompson's signature on an iron-clad lease. Shooks is curious, he wants to know what it's all about but he is foxy and just listens. However, when we get outside, he says to the Boss,

"I'm s'prised, Mrs. Ware, you'd put up so much money for half that lease. None of us figgered the Jimdandy could outlast you."

"Oh, well. I figger Pecosville is in for a real estate boom some time soon," says the Boss airily. "By the way, George, what about that busted-down shack and chunk of no-good desert sand you live on down the line? Ever think of sellin' it to some victim and findin' yourself a spot where at least the cactus will grow?"

"Huh," replies Shooks, "John Norton asks me the same thing a while back. Say, what's it all about, anyways?"

"You sold to Norton?" yips the Boss.

"Well—No." Shooks pursed his dry lips and shut up.

"Sell me an option on your property."

"I can't do it."

He couldn't be coaxed and, as we made the rounds, we had no more luck; Thompson was the only one to fall.

"Never mind," says the Boss that evening, "we got plenty, Slim, right in the center. We're rich for life."

NEXT DAY the town seemed lively as an anthill; the bank was busy right till closing time. Most every man in town and a lot of the women, too, come into the Pink Kitten to offer the Boss money for an option on her property; Norton made another stab at it during the noon hour.

"The secret's leakin' out, Slim," Mrs. Ware declares. "It won't be long now."

After dark the Jimdandy done its usual roaring trade, going high, wide and handsome, pianola crashing at full bay, raucous yelps as free whisky was dispensed to one and all.

Sheriff Tad Kingsley ate his supper at our place, loyal to the end; he is a big, tall hombre with a black mustache, one of the finest gunshots in Texas although he ain't as smart as Sherlock Holmes.

He was mooning around the Boss, it was 11 o'clock by the fancy cuckoo clock over the center of the bar mirror when a dog begins yipping and barking, just like the time before.

The Boss gives me a look and hustles over to me. "Quick, Slim," she whispers, "Ethel's chawed her rope through and she's after that polecat again! Shut her up, make it snappy; I still got hopes of buyin' more land in town and we want to keep it covered a while longer!"

So I sashay outside and shore enough, Ethel's in under the house, disturbing that skunk's housekeeping plans. Skunks are great homebodies and like one spot; they'll raise a family which will stay together and they ain't

afraid of anything much. Shucks, they don't have to be!

Ethel had dug beneath the lattice once more, and I had to go through the same motions, crawling after her with my lantern. The dirt was soaking with oil, and I had to be careful not to start a fire under there.

A hunk of rope, with ragged ends, hung from Ethel's collar; she was digging her head off where she had been working before, throwing sandy earth into my face as I approached.

"Here, you fool," I called. "Come outa there."

Ethel wagged what she called her tail and kept right on digging; sand got in my eyes, and I paused to wipe it out. The mutt had deepened the hole where she had been digging before, and as I scrunched up and reached out for her she turned and began licking my face.

The lantern threw a yellowish glow in there; I could hear the ruckus in the Jimdandy right plain, coming through open windows and the little diamonds of the latticework.

I was right at the end of Ethel's pit and my light cast down into the hole.

What I seen then took all my breath away and my eyes popped out of my head.

I crawled out like a snake in a hurry, rushed in and signalled the Boss; she took one peek at my green face and come out back.

"What's eatin' you, Slim?" she demanded.

"Come see for yourself, Boss," I growled.

I escorted her under the building and held the lantern so she could see into the hole Ethel had dug.

"Why, it's a waterpipe, that's all," she says.

"Waterpipe hell!" I tell her, "there's no line under here, Boss. That pipe was laid to run oil through!"

She got it, then, and for a moment I thought she was going to forget she was a lady. Then she pulls herself together and orders, "C'mon Slim, quiet now—we got to trace it."

IT WAS easy enough; as I said, the dirt's nothing but loose sand. With a sharp ramrod I probed here and there, follering the pipe straight north. It wasn't buried deep, and it run in under the back of the Jimdandy.

One of the lattice-work sections was loosened and I went in first, Mrs. Ware crawling after me.

"This is it," I growled.

Under the Jimdandy were a dozen or more oil cans, strewn around the end of that pipe. A funnel was stuck in the turned-up end and the cans were empty except for a few drops of thick crude oil.

"Now I savvy it all," the Boss says. "Wait'll I git my hands on that dude!"

So we start out, and as we straighten up in the shadows, a double-barreled shotgun is rammed into my side ribs and a harsh voice says,

"Reach and keep shet!" It was Al, my playmate.

"What the—" snarls the Boss, but there was somebody else covering her and I didn't even have to turn around to savvy it was J. Orville Thompson.

He gripped a pearl-handled pistol in one paw and the shaft of moonlight that hit his face didn't make it look pleasant; he was mad and the mask was off.

"Keep your teeth buttoned, you old hellcat," he snarls dangerously. "I'll shoot to kill if you yell!"

It wouldn't have done any good, with that shebang of his roaring its fool head off. "Watch how you talk to the woman I love, Thompson," I growl, and Al rams me in the small of the back with the shotgun muzzle, taking my breath away.

"Keep quiet, Slim," the Boss commands.

"March," snaps Thompson, "over to the stable, blast you. Lucky I heard your dog barking and saw your light under the Pink Kitten; I've been watching for trouble from you."

Al with the shotgun on us and Thompson with the pistol, quickly run us to the stable behind the Jimdandy. We were tied hand and foot, gagged with strips of horse blanket, and Al laid us down in an empty stall.

"Curse these fools," Thompson says to Al. "I ain't quite ready, Al. I still have to finish up on Norton; after all, he's the main game here."

They started out, locking the door behind them; I could hear them still, talking, as they passed the window.

"Take him tonight, Chief," advises Al. "Them two'll be missed by mornin'. We should be on our way."

"You're right. Norton's ripe and ready, he'll buy every option I got left. I'll tell him Janice don't fancy this place and I want to move. When a banker's ripe he'll believe anything!"

It didn't take much figgering to see the game. Thompson and Al had worked nights to run that pipe under the Pink Kitten to Norton's yard. It wasn't hard digging in the sand and they had only sunk it a foot or two. Then from time to time they would pour a can of oil into the funnel, it would run down the pipe, seep through the sand, and some would show on top of the ground.

They hadn't made the joints tight, bein' in a hurry, so oil had leaked out under the Pink Kitten; the pipe ended where Norton couldn't get to it without digging our land and he believed the oil was seeping down from Mrs. Ware's property, which accounted for him asking her to marry him as a last resort to get her fortune.

However, I was in no condition to think much except about how uncomfortable I was. Al had tied my wrists and ankles so tight I thought my hands and feet would drop off, and the dirty piece of blanket crammed in my mouth made it hard to breathe.

I could hear the Boss shifting a bit on the other side of the stall and I would have give my life if I could have helped her.

IT WAS an hour later when she suddenly says, "You okay, Slim?"

Then I hear her moving toward me, and she forces the gag out of my mouth and starts to untie my cords.

"How—how'd you do it, Boss?" I croaked, my mouth dry as an old buffalo skull.

"Huh," she whispers, "it's an old trick, to keep your muscles tense while they tie you, Slim. Besides, they rolled me against a nail stickin' out of the stall board. I finally worked my hands loose. C'mon, let's hope we ain't too late to stop Thompson."

They had took our guns but we could get more and Mrs. Ware still had her hatpin. She was outside first and we could hear the big noise in the Jimdandy as the cowhands whooped it up.

We crept along the side passage and peeked in a window. "The blonde's gone and I don't see Thompson or Al either," whispers the Boss. "I'm afeard they've started, Slim, and we'll never ketch up with 'em. Once Thompson reaches the railroad he's won and we're stung. C'mon, we better find Tad Kingsley."

We snuck to the rear again, meaning to arm ourselves and rout out the sheriff.

"Cheese it!" warns Mrs. Ware suddenly, gripping my arm.

A terrific hullabaloo rises down Tin Can Alley, on past the kitchen door of the Pink Kitten in Norton's yard. There are shrieks and yelps and yippings.

"It's Ethel!" I gasped.

We slipped that way, keeping to the shadows of the stables and woodsheds lining the alley. Out in the moonlit yard at Norton's we see a light buggy with the two

fastest horses in town—they belong to Norton—hitched to it. In the buggy is Janice and Al.

Rolling on the ground between Norton's and the Pink Kitten is J. Orville Thompson, screaming his head off in panic.

Ethel has him down.

"Help, help! Pull this dog off," shrieks Thompson.

Al leaps from the buggy and rushes to assist his chief, while the blonde yips in alarm. The Boss and me tiptoe in from the other side of the stable and I pick up a chunk of hickory stove wood from the pile while the Boss draws her hatpin.

Al bends down to pull Thompson away from Ethel; then the big hombre glimpses the Boss as she dashes at them and he tries to straighten up, digging for his gun. He gets the hogleg out and has it cocked, raising it—

"Long live the king!" I grunt as I brought my length of stovewood down on Al's head, using both hands.

Al's gun popped but the barrel wasn't up and the slug stings Thompson's hide as it makes a hole in his fancy coat and drills into the dirt.

Thompson is reaching for his own gun, but the Boss plunges her hatpin into his leg and he screams like a calliope.

I really enjoy that sound.

Al crunches up and I hit him a couple more whacks till he lay quiet. The Boss is doing fine work on Thompson, sticking him so his hands are kept busy trying to ward her off, while Ethel never enjoyed herself so much in her life, licking Thompson's face, worrying his clothes and raising general hell in the ruckus.

I snatched up Al's pistol and held it on Thompson; the blonde jumps out of the buggy and dashes up, grabbing me by the ears.

"You let my husband alone, you nasty man," she screeches.

"So he ain't your brother," snarls the Boss. "Stand back, blondie, or I'll rip your peroxided curls out—oh no, you don't!" And Mrs. Ware snatches a little pea-shooter of a gun from Janice.

MRS. WARE went for the sheriff while I held them under the Colt. Then we escorted our captives to the Jimdandy where there's most of Pecosville celebrating the oil boom. Even Norton's present, whooping it up with the best, on his twelfth bottle of root beer and bloated as a waterlogged steer.

Lining up the prisoners, Mrs. Ware tells the yarn.

"What! Why, Thompson got sixty thousand dollars from me!" wails Norton, stung to the soul.

There was hardly a citizen who hadn't dug out his sock and bought an option or two. Thompson had offered good prices for their property when he first hit town, cementing the deal with small cash payments for options. He made everybody he dealt with promise to say nothing about the matter. Then, as he let the oil secret leak out, the same folks would rush to him and buy back the options at a big profit to Thompson. John Norton was the biggest loser, he had really been Thompson's sucker although the whole town had been hard hit.

All in all, we found around $140,000 in the black bag J. Orville had been toting when Ethel set upon him and brought him down.

"I want my money back," growls Norton, and so did everybody.

"It ain't legal—" begins the sheriff.

"Shut up, Tad," horns in Mrs. Ware. "We'll hold an auction, though, to make it okay, boys, and sell these here options!"

Hatpin in hand, she stands beside Thompson.

"What'm I offered for this A-1 half-interest in the Jimdandy—did I hear eleven thousand dollars from this gent? Did I?" And she jabs Thompson with the hatpin.

He yelps sort of like Ethel but catches on. "Ouch—I offer eleven thousand dollars! Cut it out!"

"Going, going, gone—sold to J. Orville Thompson," cries Mrs. Ware, well-pleased with her work as she pockets her savings.

Funny, but J. Orville soon regains his interest in Pecosville real estate and is the highest bidder in every sale, buying back his options so everybody ends up with his own money.

"You can have him now, Tad," says the Boss. "He not only stuck a gun on Slim and me but he tried to steal our pet skunk."

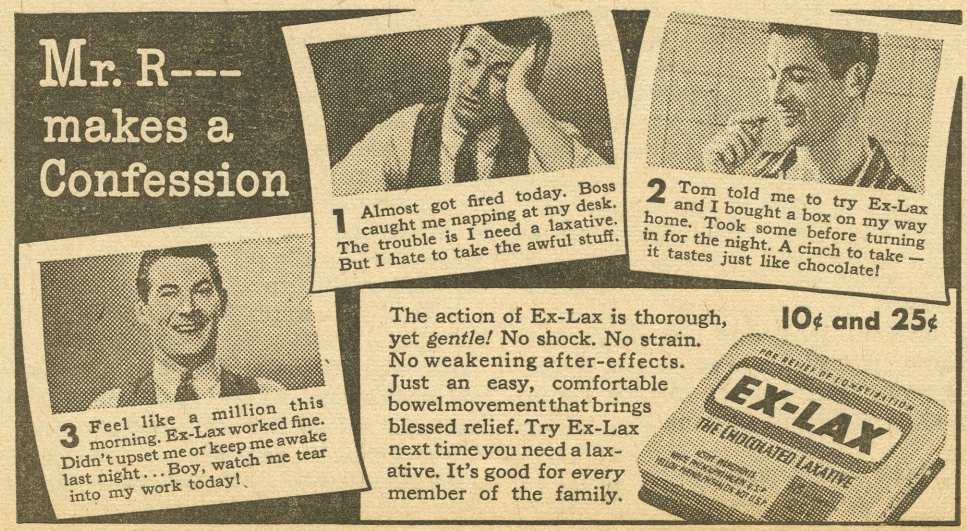
"You devil!" whines Thompson, sniffing.

So was everyone else through the proceedings though in the excitement we had let it pass. But Thompson smelled more like a polecat than one of the critters itself.

"Phew, he does smell strong," says Kingsley. "I hate to put him in my nice, clean jail."

"I tripped over something in the Pink Kitten yard," snarls Thompson. "I thought it was a cat for a sec. Then that fool dog whirled up and attacked me!"

"All I got to say is," declares the Boss, "it's mighty lucky for us all that Ethel specializes in polecats."



Wayne leaped across the bridge—but too late

Cross Your Bridges

By Jim Kjelgaard

Author of "Mountain Men," "Good Leather," etc.

Here's Wayne McCloud with two tough jobs on his hands—to catch a varmint that doesn't leave tracks, and to cure a man of terror

THE WOOD fire in Wayne McCloud's kitchen stove kept the room comfortably warm. Wayne, dressed in a gray woollen shirt and corduroy trousers, knelt beside the forty-pound, saw-toothed bear trap on the floor and rubbed the right spring with an oily rag. Up around Pipe Hollow an old rogue bear that hadn't hibernated was raiding Pipe Davers' sheep fold. The trap was for him.

The whistle of the two-car train, which made a daily run from Bradby past Dabbit Run and over the mountains to the mining town of DeMont, broke the stillness. Two short, sharp blasts followed the first, which meant that the train was stopping at the tumbledown platform and wooden shed that was the Dabbit Run station.

Leaving the trap on the floor, Wayne got up and put his jacket on. Even at the height of the summer season the train seldom stopped at Dabbit Run. That it should stop in the dead of winter was all but incredible, and whatever got off it was worth going down to see.

Wayne pushed the door open and went out. The snow lay three feet deep in the woods and sheltered places, stood in shadowed windrows in the Dabbit Run meadows, and was piled in dirty chunks on both sides of the road where the Dabbit Runners, clearing their road with shovels and horse-drawn plows, had heaped it.

When Wayne got to the station the train, a plume of fleecy smoke billowing from its stack, was speeding up the tracks toward the winter-locked mountains. On the station platform, flanked by two black traveling bags, stood a little man who was muffled in a long black overcoat.

Wayne was still ten feet away when he discovered one thing about the little man: He was living in terrible fear of something. You could tell that; you could see his fear, just as you could see it in a deer, that can find no escape from hunters.

The little man turned around, and the eyes that looked out from behind horn-rimmed spectacles were at once friendly and intelligent. Wayne stopped, confused for a moment because he felt exactly the same sensations he

knew when cold and hungry stray dogs scratched at his door. Not that the little man looked like a dog, but he was as lost and forsaken as the most miserable homeless hound. When he spoke it was with a clear, precise, almost labored English.

"I beg your pardon, sir. But might I hire a taxi, or conveyance of some sort, anywhere about here?"

Wayne scratched his head. "Gee, mister, most of the Dabbit Run cars are either froze up or put up for the winter. You might get Sime Tooker or Joe Nesbitt to take you some place with a horse an' cutter if you got to go. Where you bound?"

"I want to get to the hunting lodge of Mr. George Casey."

George Casey was a big shot from the city who had something to do with politics. He owned a hunting camp in Dabbit Run, and when he hunted there Wayne guided for him.

Wayne said, "Casey's place is closed for the winter."

"I know." The little man smiled apologetically. "But I have a letter from Mr. Casey authorizing me to open it. My name is Charles Epstein."

"I'm Wayne McCloud," Wayne said, mindful of his manners.

"Oh! Mr. Casey told me about you. He said that in addition to being an excellent woodsman, you were quite famed for—for shall we say a certain ability to take care of yourself?"

"Sho'," Wayne murmured. "Now don't that beat all? I never reckoned to get famous. But, if you're a friend of Casey's, I can just's well take you up to his camp myself. It's at the mouth of Hungry Holler, not far up the road. Think you can make it?"

"I think so. Shall I show you the letter, Mr. McCloud?"

"It ain't necessary," Wayne said. "Reckon I can tell a sheep-killin' dog from a good herder."

The little man bent to pick up the grips.

"I'll take 'em," Wayne said.

TOGETHER they trudged up the road and across the Hungry Hollow bridge to where Casey's cottage, a neat log building, nestled in a group of white birches. Black against the snow and unfrozen, the stream that coursed down the hollow curled alternately between patches of willows and widened out to form the pools for which it was famous.

The rear porch of the cottage was built right over one of those pools, which was eight feet deep with sheer, graveled sides. The pool emptied itself through a channel eighteen inches wide by a foot deep.

The little man took a key from his overcoat pocket and unlocked the cottage door. Wayne followed him in, put the two grips on a leather couch, and knelt to lay a fire in the fireplace.

Back in the forest a snow-laden limb broke with a report like a gunshot. The little man gasped, and leaped convulsively across the room. Sweating, he sank down in a chair. Wayne rose.

"Look," he said bluntly. "I don't know what you're scared of, or who you're hidin' from. But I do know that you must be all right or you wouldn't have a key to Casey's camp. Whatever it is chasin' you—come down an' stay with me an' it'll have one hell of a time gettin' you."

The little man smiled, and his face was filled with a gentle, sad wistfulness. But there was something else in it, something as hard as winter ice, and it was shadowed by a deep despair. He seemed wilted, lifeless, as if his vital spirit had been crushed.

"With all my heart I thank you," he said. "But the road I am on I must travel alone and without aid."

Wayne shrugged. Other people's personal affairs were certainly none of his. Of course, if he saw any danger threatening this frightened little man, he would take a hand anyway.

He said, "I'll be around from time to time. There's grub in the shanty. I go to Bradby every now'n then, an' I'll bring you some more before you run out."

"Bradby?" the little man said. "Oh yes—the village where I got off one train and on the one that brought me here." He took a twenty-dollar bill from his pocket and handed it to Wayne. "Bring me some—as you say—grub. Your services have been of inestimable value. If I might pay you for them—"

"Nope," Wayne said.

He went out the door. Behind him he heard the bolt snapping into place and the click of the lock after that. His head down and his hands in his pockets, he started back toward his house.

Suddenly the winter's silence was broken by the jangle of sleigh bells. Sime Tooker, driving a horse and cutter, drew up beside him.

"Hi, Wayne. Want a ride?"

"Sure thing."

Wayne climbed in beside him and Sime slapped the reins over the horse's back.

"I just come from Pipe Hollow," he said. "Pipe Davers got the bear as has been raidin' his sheep fold. Darn thing's big's a horse. It's worth goin' up to see, Wayne."

"So Pipe git it hisself, huh?" Wayne said. "Reckon he won't skin it out today?"

"Reckon he won't," Sime agreed. "He said somethin' about gettin' you to help him."

"I'll go up in the mornin'," Wayne said.

WAYNE SLEPT late, and when he got to Pipe's house the next morning there was a crowd already there—business men from Bradby, Dabbit Runners, a sprinkling of high-school boys and girls, and two strangers. These last were two men, one young and slim and the other middle-aged and heavy with a pale scar on his chin, evidently salesmen who had spent the night in Bradby.

Pipe Davers, a lean-jawed hillbilly thin as a weasel and muscled like one, stood a little to one side. Wayne joined him.

"He's a big 'un, Pipe."

"He is sizable," Pipe agreed. "What do you think he'll weigh?"

"Six hundred pounds."

Pipe said, "I figger six twenty-five. Want to stay an' help me skin him an' cut him up?"

"Sure. We'll wait for some of the touristers to go away first?"

"Yeah."

It was noon when Wayne and Pipe started to skin the bear, hung by his hind feet from a tripod, and four o'clock when they had the skin off and the carcass cut up. Wayne helped Pipe with his farm chores, ate supper with Pipe and his wife and seven children, and in the early darkness of a gathering winter night started back down the road.

There was no moon, but the snowy background re-

lieved what otherwise would have been intense blackness. Wayne saw the road, a wet brown line flanked by snow banks, stretching away before him. He was a hundred and fifty feet from Hungry Hollow when out of it stole something that might have been a shadow—only it wasn't. It paused in the road for a second and was gone. Wayne ran forward.

"Hey, you!"

There was no answer, no sound of any kind. A chill ran up and down Wayne's spine. If he hadn't known that he could trust his eyes he might have believed that they were playing him tricks.

He ran up the path leading to Casey's cottage, pounded on the door. There was a few seconds of silence. Then the door opened and Wayne walked in to stagger a dozen steps across the room as a chair, aimed at his head, came crashing down on his right shoulder.

Wayne turned, ready to fight. The chair gripped in both hands, the little man stood against the opposite wall. Wayne measured the distance between them and made ready to spring. But he restrained himself as his anger began to give way to bewilderment.

The little man's face was white. Beads of sweat stood on his brow. His eyes were dilated, blank and almost unseeing. Again the deer, Wayne thought, a buck brought to bay without hope of escape and with full knowledge that anything that came would be an enemy. Like the buck, the little man attacked without thought and also without any chance of winning. He couldn't fight. If he could, he would have got Wayne with the chair.

The chair raised, he came stalking warily across the floor. Wayne waited. When the little man attempted to swing again, Wayne grasped the chair by the leg. With a quick jerk he pulled it from the little man's hand and sent him spinning across the floor to bring up against the wall. Wayne leaped over, encircled the little man's frail body with his right arm.

He shouted, "Come out of it!"

The little man squirmed and kicked, spat like an enraged cat. With his left hand Wayne smacked him sharply across the cheek.

"Come out of it! It's Wayne McCloud."

THE little man subsided. He shook his head as though to clear it. His tense body relaxed and sanity flowed back into his face. Wayne released him.

"The next time you try to smack anybody down it might be a good idea to get him the first shot," he said dryly.

"I—I expected nobody," the little man muttered. "That is, nobody but one of them. I'm sorry."

"Forget it," Wayne said. "There's no harm done. But don't try this with the wrong man or you might get hurt."

Still flushed and shaken, the little man sank into a chair.

"I'm sorry," he said again. "All I thought of was killing him if I could."

"Not a bad idea," Wayne murmured. "Would it be askin' too much to ask who you was expectin'?"

The little man looked at him frankly. "What would you do if you were about to be killed?"

"I'd make prep'rations agin' it."

"How?"

"I'd load up my gun, an' when somebody came to kill me, I'd haul off an' kill them instead."

The little man smiled. "My friend, you would never get a chance to shoot."

"Why?"

"Because the thing you would fight is not a man. It has a human form, and is made of flesh and blood. But it is a machine, trained from the day it is born for the function it assumes. It strikes in the dark, and after it has struck leaves not the slightest trace of its presence."

"Why's he chasin' you?" Wayne demanded.

"I am a chemist. All I ever wanted to do was to live in peace and work as I saw fit. But they imprisoned me in one of their laboratories to make me work for death. For a long time I had no choice. Then I escaped.

"Due to the very nature of the work they made me do, I could not help acquiring a knowledge of many secrets vital to them. They thought I couldn't escape. Now they wish to make sure that no one else benefits by the things I learned."

"Why didn't you go to the police?"

The little man smiled wanly. "I still await official permission to remain in this country. To reveal my presence might be to embarrass several very good and very kind people who were instrumental in bringing me here."

"That kind of a game, huh?" Wayne stroked his lip with a speculative finger. "Well, whoever's chasin' you sure don't sound like no angel, so's he can't come flyin' up here. He's got to walk or ride, an' anything as does either has to leave tracks. Anything as leaves tracks ain't so all-fired good it can do all you says it can. I'll bet a prime fox again' a rubbed possum that the man I saw run out of Hungry Holler—"

"The what?"

"When I was comin' down the road a man run out of Hungry Holler."

"They've found me," the little man said, more to himself than to Wayne. "One of them must have seen me get on the train. There is no escape."

"Don't be so rabbity!" Wayne snapped. "That guy come out of this holler an' he must of left tracks. I'll find 'em for you. When I find 'em, I'll find who made 'em."

He picked up a lantern, lit it, and plunged into the winter night. He found his own tracks and those of the little man, but no others. The snow on either side of the path was unbroken. No one had walked there, and in the road it was impossible to distinguish one track from another. Wayne went back into the cottage.

"I didn't find nothin'," he admitted. "Why don't you come down to my house? I got a few good guns there, an' I shoot 'em real often."

"No," the little man declined. "It is thoughtful of you. But I cannot endanger your life with mine."

"I wouldn't take it that mine was in any danger," Wayne assured him. "Can you handle a gun?"

"No."

"That's a handicap." Wayne admitted. "I'm goin' now. You stay inside. This jasper won't be tryin' his skullduggery except by night, an' I got an idea he won't come back tonight. Do you know if he might have a partner with him?"

"I think not. Usually they work alone."

Wayne ran down the road to his house. Twenty minutes later he came back up with a rifle in one hand and a heavy load on his back. For a while he puttered around the rear porch of Casey's cottage, then backed off into the woods and stood behind a tree with the rifle ready.

A COLD morning broke in a cloudy sky. The puddles froze over and the snow formed a crust. Wayne knelt to feel it. A sharp cold snap might ruin all his plans. Through the sullen gray light of morning he made his way to the cottage he had watched all night, and knocked on the door. The little man's eyes were streaked with red, and there were great dark circles under them. His face was heavy with fatigue.

Wayne said, "Howdy. Nice mornin'."

"You're up early," the little man stepped aside to let him enter.

"I gen'rally figger to roust around in good time," Wayne said. "Did your ghost come back?"

"No. There was no more sign of him."

"Must of flapped his wings an' took off," Wayne said. "You didn't get any too much sleep last night, mister. If you want, I'll sit around the shanty with this fusee while you grab some."

The little man said, "I'm not afraid by daylight."

"Well, I'll be kitin' along," Wayne said. "I'll be seein' you."

He returned to his house and slept until noon. Then he got up and for a while busied himself washing a week's accumulation of dishes, sweeping, and doing the numberless other little things he hated, but that a bachelor living alone has to do some time.

Night had again come to Dabbit Run when, with his rifle under his arm, he started back up the road. It was reasonable to suppose, that if the man he had seen stealing out of Hungry Hollow was really after the little man in Casey's cottage and had not been just a Dabbit Runner off on some secret mission of his own, he would strike again soon. A stranger hanging around Dabbit Run was sure to be noticed; everyone knew of the little man in the cottage already.

A dim light inside the cottage made yellow squares of the windows when Wayne got to Hungry Hollow. For a moment he lingered on the bridge, casting around in the darkness for the tree behind which he had hidden last night. He found it, started toward it. Then a part of the bridge seemed to detach itself and tower over him.

Something smashed against the side of his head. Vainly he strove to stay on his feet. A million shooting stars flashed before his eyes. His knees buckled, and he fell forward in the snow.

The cold awakened him. He put both hands down and raised himself to his elbows. The effort made him perspire profusely, and he lay down again to cool his face against the snow. Once more he tried to get up. His head throbbed and he retched violently. But he persisted. When he got to his feet he felt better. Putting his hand to his head, he encountered a great lump that was covered with matted, dried blood.

He did not try to pick up his rifle, for he knew that he might not be able to get up again if he stooped. He staggered to the cottage, rapped on the door.

"Who's there?" It was the litte man's voice.

"Wayne McCloud."

The door was opened. The little man passed an arm about Wayne's shoulders, guided him to a chair. A glass was held to his lips. Wayne drank, and felt the fire of the brandy sweep through him.

"What happened?" the little man asked quietly.

"Somebody jumped me on the bridge."

The little man said, "I knew he would come. You should not have interfered. You might have been killed."

"Well, I wasn't. Do you still think there was only one of 'em chasin' you?"

"That's all. Now do you believe it hopeless to try to evade or capture him?"

"No," Wayne said. "I don't."

Wayne rose to his feet, steadied himself on the chair for a few seconds, and walked over to pick up a lantern. The little man looked at him questioningly, made as if to stop him. Then he followed Wayne, who went outside and plowed through the snow to the rear of the cottage and Hungry Hollow Creek.

Wayne knelt at the edge of the deep pool and ran his hand down one of the cement pillars that, built in the water, supported the porch. He brought up a heavy wire, one end of which was tightened securely about the pillar. Hand over hand, he drew in the dead weight on the end of the wire. A chain came in sight, and one spring of a bear trap.

Wayne dragged up onto the bank the heavy-set scarred salesman he had seen at Pipe Davers'. The little man held the lantern high, looked into the dead man's face.

"Schiebler!" he gasped. He turned to Wayne. "Do you know what you've done? This man was a foreign agent."

Wayne said grimly, "I reckon I know what I was doin'. Varmints got to walk some place, an' if this one didn't leave any tracks in the snow he must of walked in the crick. That bear trap right in the narrow neck couldn't help but ketch him, an' he fell in the deep pool. The weight of the trap kept him there.

"He wouldn't of drowned if he hadn't slugged me 'cause I'd of got him out. I know a couple of caves where he never will be found, an' I'll pack him there tonight. You're safe now, an' mebbe somebody'll think twice afore they sick another hired, foreign killer on Dabbit Run."

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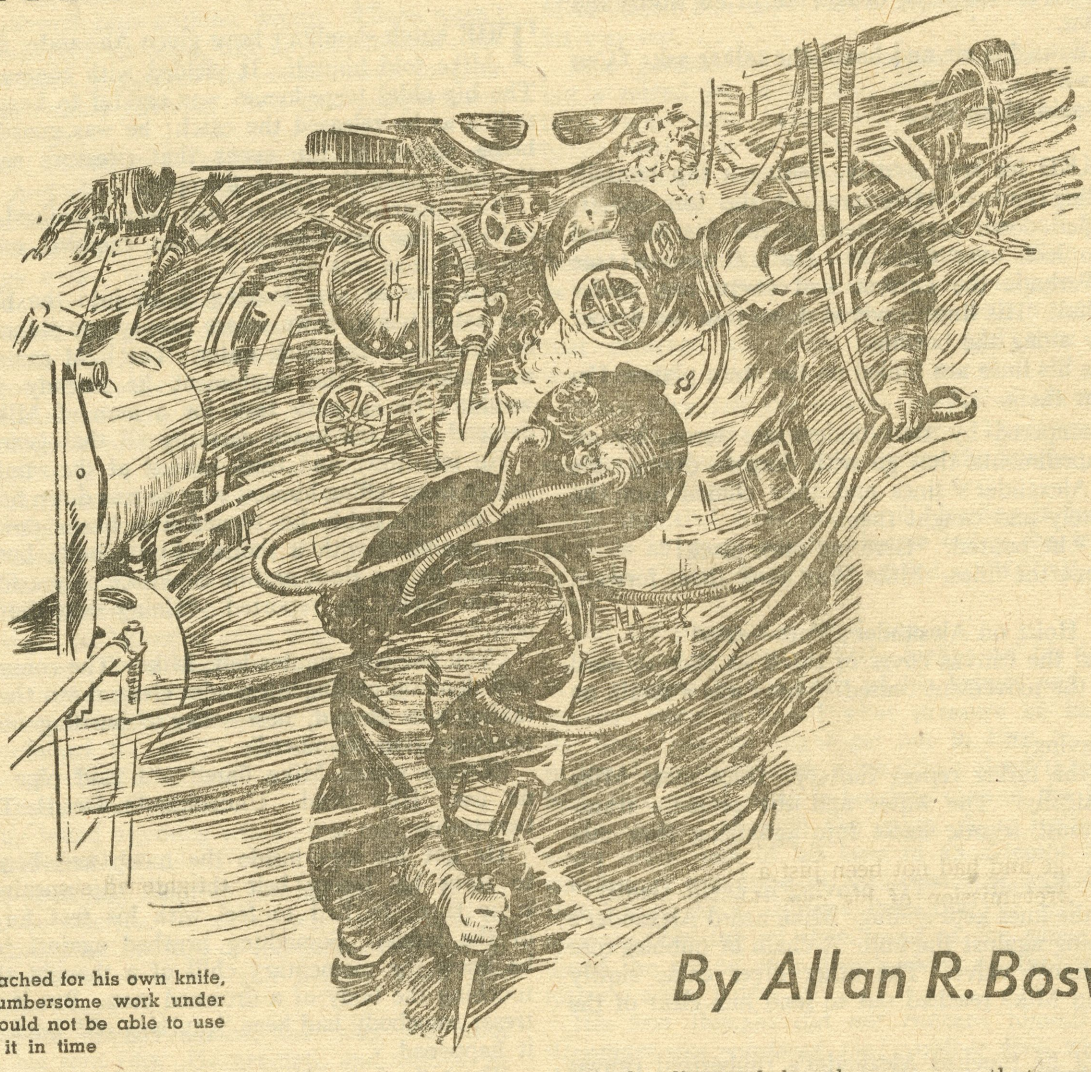


Mike Way reached for his own knife, but it was cumbersome work under water. He would not be able to use it in time

By Allan R. Bosworth

CHAPTER XXIV

DEATH ON THE BOTTOM

THE pressure bit into Mike Way's rugged body. It drove hard against his sore ribs with each of his quickening breaths; it hammered his eardrums and made his head whirl with a weakness he had not known possessed him. He swallowed hard a dozen times, his ears going *kaloomph!* with each constriction of his throat. It sounded in his head the way a railway trestle sounds inside a train whipping past at express speed.

He looked down as much as his helmet and the bulky air-filled suit would allow, and made out the length of the *Starfish:* a dark, whale-like shadow that straggled into the blue-green dimness. His feet jarred on the buckboards.

"On deck;" he reported in his telephone. "I'm on the submarine."

"Okay, Mike," the talker answered. "Take it slow, now; take it slow and get your bearings."

"Slow . . ." Mike snorted. He loosened his grip on the descending line, and turned aft with sure direction, peering along the dimness of the whaleback hull for Alexander. But there was no sign of the stocky diver.

Mike Way reported this to the *Algonquin.* The talker said: "He's still getting air. Is that hatch open?"

"What's that?" Mike asked. His voice was flat and queerly distorted by the pressure that roared into his helmet; he throttled down his air for a few seconds so he could hear the man on deck and not a meaningless jumble. Immediately, he felt his breastplate slam against his chest, shooting a spasm of pain through those injured ribs.

The talker repeated.

"Tell you in a minute!" Mike said. He gave himself air again, and leaned against the current. A goggled-eyed fish brushed across his face port.

"I'm getting close to the hatch, now. I can't see anything."

Then he stopped. Alexander wasn't in sight. But yonder were his lifeline and air hose: the slender threads upon which any diver's life is suspended. They straggled over the side, beyond the hatch down toward the bottom.

Mike Way felt the chill of the sea, then, driving into his blood and bone. He could sense what had happened. A misstep of a few inches on this slippery deck—a fall over the side. Twenty feet and more to the mud.

Twenty feed didn't seem like much when you were already two hundred and forty down. But it was enough to increase the pressure sharply and suddenly. So much that unless a man had time to shoot more air into his suit to counteract the increase, the "squeeze" got him.

There had been men whose bodies were compressed to pulp and forced into the small globular space of their unyielding helmets by such squeezes.

The first installment of this six-part serial, herein concluded, appeared in the Argosy for March 15

He said, "I see his lines, now. He must have fallen over the side, well aft. Near the stern planes." And the pressure took all the tense drama out of his words and made them flat.

He valved down his air and heard the talker ask: "Can you reach him?"

"Minute!" said Mike Way.

HE WORKED his way swiftly, risking a slip himself. The railing ended; Mike grasped the fore-and-aft line that angled down to the stern of the *Starfish,* and leaned out to look over the side. He still couldn't see Alexander. Perhaps the current had swept him under the rounded hull. His lines wavered down into the deeper dusk that lay along the bottom.

"Looks like his lines are fouled on the stern planes. I'm trying to clear them. . ."

He was hampered by that underwater torch, by all the bulky impedimenta that go with deepsea diving. He reached for Alexander's lines and they eluded him; he tried desperately and caught them.

"On deck!" he panted. "Give me some slack!"

Current bent the lines. Mike Way took them forward a few feet.

"On deck! Hoist on Alexander's lines—easy!"

He watched the canvas cover of the lines slide upward a little, then the movement ceased. There was a strain on the lines.

" 'Vast heaving!"

He heard the talker repeat the cry. Once more Mike worked frantically. The water and the pressure transformed the most frantic haste into agonizing slow motion. . . .

"On deck!" he called. "Try heaving in again. Gently!"

This time the lines kept sliding. Mike heard Alexander's helmet bumping against the hull. A chain of bubbles rose from the exhaust valve. The other diver came slowly into view, and Mike reached out to fend him clear of the submarine.

The instant he touched Alexander's rubberized canvas suit, he knew the man was dead. The suit was filling again as pressure was reduced, but it was still too shrunken for a man of Alexander's stockiness; *it looked almost as if the copper breast plate were touching the suit's back.*

Mike Way looked up, watching a dead man's weighted shoes going aloft. How many did that make? Twenty-two in the *Starfish*—two murdered—a diver killed by a squeeze. . . .

"Mike! Are you okay? Sound off, down there!"

Mike Way sounded off with an oath. "Pipe down," he said savagely. "Of course I'm okay. Pipe down and leave me alone!"

He moved forward again, holding to the fore-and-aft line, and came to the hatch. It would take him into the after torpedo room, and the engineroom was just forward of that. He remembered that thing he had seen in his previous dive: the blade-like object protruding from a vent in the conning tower. But it must have come from the inside of the *Starfish.* Get it later, Mike thought. Get the hatch open, now. *Time's passing!*

Twenty minutes was supposed to be the safe limit to which a man could stay down under this pressure of more than a hundred pounds to the square inch. The pressure pushed from all sides: it had your head in a vise, squeezing it, muddling your thoughts; it lay heavily against your chest and made you breathe shallowly and fast.

Mike Way knelt clumsily at the hatch. "On deck," he said. "I'm opening the hatch. I'll need a submarine lamp."

"Coming down on the descending line," the talker reported.

THE hatch shouldn't have given Alexander any trouble, Mike told himself. It yielded with comparative ease. The big chief torpedoman was careful to keep out of its radius as he released the catch; he was guarding against being struck in the event that pressure sealed inside the hull made the cover fly open.

But apparently pressure had been equalized, inside and out. A few good-sized bubbles rumbled out into the sea, and that was all.

And now he was looking down into the blackness of the hatch trunk, down where twenty-two shipmates would be floating in the dark water. The light came down and was added to the equipment he already carried. It wouldn't be an easy task for a man of Mike's size to descend into the hatch carrying all that gear.

He felt dizzy and thick-headed at the same time. He had to keep telling himself why he was down here. Switching on the light, he turned the beam downward. It was equipped with a thousand-watt bulb, but the water showed only a glow, and he could see only a few feet.

"On deck," he reported. "Going into the submarine, now."

"You got ten minutes left, Mike. The commander says well done on getting Alexander clear, down there. They're taking him aboard, now—they're hustling him into the recompression chamber."

"Damn you!" Mike flared. "I said pipe down! It's no use. He's dead. Understand? Dead! That makes twenty-five!"

He got his legs inside the hatch and began fighting to force his heavy belt through the opening. At the same time, he had to feel with his feet for the rungs of the ladder. Something brushed against his leg and he knew the momentary chill of a thought that he was touching the body of a drowned man. But it was a mattress; somebody had been "caulking off" back here before it happened.

The talker's incoherent voice sounded in his earphones. He swore and throttled down his air.

"The commander says don't go too far, Mike. You haven't got but eight minutes."

"Hell with that," Mike said thickly.

He fought his way on down.

THE lamp gave a little better light in the confines of the torpedo room. Mike swung it forward and saw that the watertight door leading to the engineroom had not been shut. This told him how mercifully quick death had come to the men back here: nobody had had time to close that door against the water, wherever it came from.

This compartment was equipped as the torpedo room forward had been: it had the escape hatch, and a smoke bomb and telephone buoy that could be released from the deck above. Nobody had had a chance to send up that distress signal, either.

He turned the light upward, and swung it down again hastily. There were men floating against the overhead, against the maze of pipes and electrical conduits. . .

"On deck! I'm going forward."

Slack came freely, but there was always the danger that the lines would foul on something as they paid through the hatch. Mike came to the open door; it was small, and he had to stoop and fight his bulk through it, dragging the underwater torch after him.

He saw more dungaree-clad corpses. One was somehow caught on one of the Diesels that had ceased their throbbing just before the *Starfish* made her fatal dive.

Under this deck were the storage batteries that drove the ship under the sea.

The lamp showed him nothing wrong. There wasn't time for a thorough inspection, but he told himself that to come in at such a rate, water would have to pour through a considerable opening. And this compartment looked tight enough.

Another door. It led into the crew's quarters; it was nearly closed. And when Mike Way had struggled through it, his real troubles began.

There were mattresses, mess tables and benches adrift, here in a soggy mass. He pushed them out of his way and dropped to his hands and knees to crawl beneath them. They moved sluggishly, then settled in his wake—settled to imperil the free movement of his lines. He could only move by inches, and the clutter of water-logged gear obstructed the rays of his lamp. He saw that several of the men had been trapped here as they slept—men clad only in skivvie shirts and drawers. In the pigboats, there are always men on watch; there are always men sleeping until they are called again.

"On the bottom!" the talker said. "Your time's about up, Chief. The commander says to allow yourself time to get back out of the submarine."

"Hell with that, too," grunted Mike Way.

He kept crawling. The underwater torch bumped along the deck where the brass-capped toes of his shoes scraped. Ahead of him was the galley door, and beyond that little space that contained the cook's electric range was the door Lieutenant McQuaid had shut while Cardoni screamed and hammered at him.

If Mike Way found anything wrong, this trip, it would have to be in the galley.

He paused, listening, shutting off his air for a few seconds to cut out the roar in his helmet. He thought he had heard a thump on the hull of the submarine. Sounds play queer tricks under water, and nobody knew this better than Mike Way.

The breastplate pressed against his body and shot pain through his sore ribs. He grunted, and turned on the air again as he crawled through the oval door into the galley.

He swung the light around and upward. It showed him what he had been seeking through all of this dangerous penetration farther into the interior of the *Starfish.*

Overhead was a blower opening off the twenty-four inch main air induction—the huge ventilating pipe which ran aft to feed fresh air, when the submarine was on the surface, to the crew's quarters, the engineroom, and the after torpedo room. It was fed by air forced into those vents on the conning tower when the ship was under way. Diving, the big valve at its top was closed; and when this operation had been performed, a red light turned green on that indicator board the pigboat sailors called the Christmas tree.

Mike Way stood stock still in the small galley, staring at what he saw. The induction was torn and bulged. It was here that the water had come in—a column of water two feet in diameter, with all the pressure of the sea behind it.

HE REMEMBERED, with an effort, that he had to find out *why* this had happened. He remembered that day when the diving growler was sounding its loud warning through the ship. All the lights had gone green. . .

"On deck!" Mike said thickly. His tongue was dry, and clinging to the roof of his mouth. "On deck—turn on the igniter."

"You'd better come up," the talker said. "The commander—"

"Turn on the igniter! I've got to cut away some steel before I can get out of here. Turn the igniter on now!"

The talker translated this literally. Off the telephone, Mike heard him say: "He's trapped! He's got to burn his way out. . . ."

Mike pressed the contact points together after adjusting a mixed jet of oxygen, nitrogen and air from the torch supply lines. There was a popping sound, and brilliance burst from the torch nozzle.

He adjusted the valves further and set his lamp down on the electric range. The torch gave more light; it shot a spurt of metal-eating flame more than six feet. Mike turned it against the main induction. With this torch he could cut inch-thick steel a foot a minute and better.

The flame sheared into the pipe with a roaring sound that drowned all other noises. And then something went wrong.

Mike Way felt the sudden weight of his breastplate. The diving suit hugged his legs. That was where a squeeze always began: down below the knees—

His air was off!

He throttled down the torch, leaving it burning just as little as was possible without losing the jet of flame entirely. "On deck!" he called. "My air—*on deck, there!*"

But the phone was dead, too.

The squeeze crept a little higher on his legs. Mike Way reached to the back of his helmet and closed the exhaust valve to hoard what pressure he had left. At the best, now, he might get out in time to be hoisted to the *Algonquin's* deck more nearly dead than alive. At best, this would mean a horrible case of the bends.

He crawled through the galley door, feeling his way along every inch of his lines in an attempt to discover whether or not some of this clutter of gear had fouled them down here. It was then that he felt an almost imperceptible tug on them—and at the same instant he heard the scrape of a diver's shoes on the rungs of the torpedo room ladder.

His first thought did not concern himself. It was: *Alexander was murdered, too!* Another diver was prowling the blackness of the *Starfish;* the chances were Alexander had been knocked over the side as he knelt to open the hatch.

Mike Way stopped crawling, stopped feeling his lines as he back trailed. Instead, he got to his feet, holding his breath as long as he dared to conserve his precious air. He thrust himself forward, shouldering aside the floating gear with all the strength of his big, rugged body. An anger as white hot as the jet of flame from that torch drove him on far beyond the point where a weaker man would have stumbled and fallen to die.

In this fashion he came to the door between the torpedo room and the engineroom, and saw his man.

The mysterious diver was crouched there, and Mike Way sensed, rather than saw, what he was doing. He had kinked Mike's lines and was holding the kink in them so that virtually all of the life-giving air was shut off; he was sawing at the canvas covering with his knife. The telephone wire had already been cut. At any stroke of the knife, now, the air hose might be severed.

Mike Way lunged forward with the last desperate ounce of his strength and will. The man's helmet came up in the glow of his lamp; the diffused glare of the light was in Mike's eyes, and recognition of the face behind the helmet port was impossible.

But he had seen Mike Way. He came erect in that odd, slow motion style, the lines still kinked in his hand. With the other, he lashed out at the big chief torpedoman.

The knife missed by inches. Mike Way started to reach for his own, but it was a cumbersome job to get the weapon out of that sheath down at his right side.

It would all be over before he could bring the knife into play.

Then he remembered the burning underwater torch. He swung the nozzle around and hit the valves. The jet leaped out like a live thing. Its brilliance sizzled against the bulkhead inches from the watertight door; it swung menacingly toward the fragile rubberized canvas suit of the other diver.

One breath of the flame against that suit, and the man who had attempted to kill Mike Way would be dead.

CHAPTER XXV

MUSTER ALL HANDS

VINCE AYRES beckoned for Evelyn to accompany him, and went outside the isolation ward. John Thorpe's startling note, expressing willingness to trade a confession for leniency, was still in the doctor's hand.

He passed it to Evelyn. "What do you think of this?"

She read the rounded scrawl twice, first with an exclamation of surprise, and then with a doubtful shake of her head. "I think he's crazy, after a fashion!" she said. "He wants to attract attention to himself again, Vince. Being locked up below has taken him out of the spotlight. He's grandstanding."

Vince removed his glasses and thoughtfully polished them. "I don't know," he said. "It depends on what he intends to confess."

"Why, the murders—" the girl began, then stopped. She could see what Vince meant.

"Let's take it to the admiral," he told her. "After all, the old boy is in charge, now. Funny thing about Thorpe, and how we've gone right along throughout this entire investigation, allowing our hunches and our sympathies to influence us—especially in his case. I only wish the evidence that has pointed to him all along could be directed against somebody I could *believe* is guilty."

Evelyn's level brows frowned over an idea. "He picked a strange time to talk, if he really intends to confess to the murders," she said. "Just when the gun had been found in Barbara West's room. Thorpe didn't put it there, Vince. She knew the gun was there, and it's extremely unlikely that she and Thorpe would be sharing any secret."

"The second-class seaman and the spoiled social climber?" Vince smiled. "Hardly!"

He knocked, and the admiral boomed an invitation for them to enter. His wheelchair was still moored alongside the more stable bed, and the gaunt, shaggy-browed old sea dog had put aside Mahan for a renewed study of the log of the *Starfish.*

He laid this down, and smiled quizzically. Vince went straight to the point.

"Orders placing you in command of the investigation have been posted in the isolation ward, sir," he said. "May I consider myself properly relieved?"

There was something like humor lurking far back in the sea-blue depths of the old man's eyes. Vince and the girl remembered that he had commanded a battleship, in his day, and a whole submarine force.

He said gruffly, "I relieve you, doctor. And now what's on your mind? Oh, by the way, I just received a delayed message from the *Algonquin.* Mike Way has dived again."

VINCE and the girl looked at each other in dismay. Vince said, slowly: "Then he's a triple-plated fool! And," he added more softly, "a very brave man, too."

"What's this likely to do to him?" Admiral Wetherbee asked.

"Nobody could say. Going under pressure again wouldn't hurt him, unless the last dive had strained his heart or something; and in that case the *Algonquin's* medical officer certainly wouldn't permit him to dive. It's the coming up. If there is still some of that nitrogen in his blood, this time he'll have to stay in that recompression tank until he rates another hashmark to be safely decompressed."

"And I need him here tonight," the admiral said. "We've got to go into a condition of readiness, as I set forth in the work and drill schedule."

Vince suppressed a smile. The admiral, he thought, was still playing a game.

"Here's a matter for you to consider," he said, and handed the old man Thorpe's note.

"H'm!" the admiral said as he read it. "Evelyn, push that buttom for me. Thank you. Well, I expected the lad to see things my way, after that talk I had with him. This will help, doctor, if it's what I think it is."

A corpsman came to the door and stood respectfully at attention. "Instruct the chief master-at-arms to have John Thorpe, seaman second, lay up to my room right away," the admiral said.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"I needed Mike Way," the old man repeated as they waited. "I had expected to hear his report of what he found aboard the *Starfish* in that previous dive, and to go over his report with Lieutenant Brill. Oh, yes, doctor—will you see that Lieutenant Brill is released from his room, when we've finished talking to Thorpe? I see no further reason for his detention."

Evelyn Brill's eyes thanked the admiral. He chuckled, and added: "When we go into Condition Two, we'll need all hands."

The big chief entered, then, with Thorpe. The young survivor of the *Starfish* was trembling, and a pallor was in his thin, nervously drawn features. He stood at attention.

"Stand easy, lad," the admiral said kindly. "Here—take that chair. Now, we want you to talk freely; tell us everything. Miss Brill, you're prepared to take a record of this?"

"Yes, sir," Evelyn said.

Thorpe's lips quivered. He looked appealingly toward Vince.

"Doctor Ayres, you won't let them—you won't—" he began.

"I can't promise you anything, Thorpe," Vince said. "But I think you should know by now that we're your friends."

"Well," the young sailor began falteringly, "I've thought things over—like you said, sir." He looked at the admiral. "I've decided I want to stay in the Navy."

Vince Ayres drew a relieved breath. This wasn't going to be a confession of murder, after all.

"I WASN'T asleep when I was supposed to be sleepwalking at the hospital and on this ship," Thorpe blurted. "I was putting on, sir. Because—because I wanted out of the Service. I wanted out before I got out of boot camp. But after being shut up down there in the submarine—down there in the dark with those fellows aft all dead—I—I thought I couldn't stand it!"

"Go on," Vince said. "Can you tell us where you got the idea of faking somnambulism?"

"I heard about a man who got a medical survey because he walked in his sleep, sir."

"That night at the hospital," the admiral put in. "You knew the night watchman was going to hit you, didn't you?"

"Not until he had already raised that billiard cue, sir. It was too late to duck, then."

"Why did you carry the billiard cue?" Vince asked.

"Well, this other man I heard about—it was years ago, they told me—was a hospital apprentice. He started parading around at night with a litter on his shoulder and made them think he was dreaming about doing litter drill. I was going to say I dreamed I was carrying a rifle again like we did in boot camp. I—I forgot, after that watchman hit me."

The admiral rubbed his chin. "And later—aboard the *Consolation*—you were taking advantage of the interest in my logbook when you came in here and picked up the book while pretending to be asleep?"

Thorpe nodded. The old officer seemed pleased at this acknowledgment of interest aroused by his log.

"But you still didn't see or hear anything in the room where Cardoni was killed?" Vince pursued. "Even awake?"

Thorpe shuddered. "No, sir. It was dark. We had turned the lights out."

"Let's go back to the hospital, and Lieutenant McQuaid's murder," Vince said. "I'll draw a rough diagram of that portion of the buildings. Sick Officers' Quarters ran like this. Odd-numbered quiet rooms and the diet kitchen all had windows opening on the balcony. You were on that balcony, Thorpe."

"Yes, sir," the boy said. "I guess Miss Brill saw me. It was raining and dark. I went over as far as the surgical building on the balcony, but the hall doors were locked over there, and I had to come back. I saw Miss Brill in front of me—she dropped her cape and ran."

"That wasn't Miss Brill," Vince corrected. "It was Barbara West, wearing Miss Brill's cape."

The sailor said, "Oh!" and thought for a minute. "I saw somebody else raising a window, and I had to get away from there because I wanted them to find me down on the grounds, and not on the balcony. So I—"

Vince put the diagram into Thorpe's hands. "Could you remember what window it would have been?" he asked. "And was it being raised from the inside, or out?"

"Inside, sir," Thorpe said. "Let's see. It was here. I know, because the man was standing in the dark. And this room, and the one on the other side were both lighted."

He indicated a window on the diagram. It was Number Three—the quiet room that had not been occupied. It was the room from which a brick had been taken: the brick that battered Lieutenant McQuaid to death.

"I HURRIED past there," Thorpe was saying, "and went down the balcony to the other wing. There was a door open there, and I got down on the grounds. I had to walk up and down by the fence for a long time before anybody saw me, and then the watchman came and threw his flashlight into my face. The next thing I knew, he grabbed the billiard cue and hit me."

"No wonder," Vince said dryly. "McCarthy was looking for a murderer, by that time. And the person you saw in the dark window was that murderer—on his way out to commit the crime."

He had no more questions. But the admiral looked up beneath his shaggy brows. "What were your duties in the *Starfish,* Thorpe?"

"Messcooking, sir. That was one reason I hated it. I—I didn't join the Navy to be a waiter."

"Almost every seaman gets a taste of it," the old man reminded the boy. "In the Navy, we don't always get a billet we like. The Navy's bigger than any of its jobs, any of its men. And as you go along, the better details come your way."

Thorpe hung his head. "I know it now, sir," he said humbly. "If I get off without being kicked out, I'll—I'll messcook, or do whatever they tell me to do, sir."

"You do that," the admiral answered, "and you're on your way to becoming a man-o'-warsman. I think you can go, now, Thorpe. You aren't under arrest any longer. But until after tonight, don't make yourself too conspicuous. Understand?"

Thorpe straightened as he stood, squaring his shoulders. He said, "Aye, aye, sir! Thank you, sir!" He was bareheaded, but he saluted. And Admiral Wetherbee, in a wheelchair though he was, returned the salute with the utmost gravity.

"I suppose," he rumbled after the door had closed on Thorpe, "some sort of disciplinary action will have to be taken against that lad. But I hope we can prevent it from being too severe. The Navy is going to make a man out of him."

"Well," Vince said slowly, "what did we find out? That the murderer went through Number Three quiet room. We already knew he'd been in there to get the brick. The question is, did he enter the room from the hall, or from the balcony?"

"From the hall," Evelyn answered. "Otherwise why should he have had to raise the window from the inside? It would already have been open."

"Right, young lady," the admiral said. "Had it occurred to either of you that perhaps the reason Victor Melhorne didn't answer when Barbara West called to him at his window was that he wasn't in the room at the moment?"

Vince nodded. He'd already considered that possibility. Barbara had said she heard Melhorne's heavy breathing. But she wouldn't be likely to reveal anything that might incriminate the man she was going to marry. And there seemed to be little chance of proving that Melhorne had absented himself from his room. In a hospital hallway, such as that in S.O.Q., several men could have been moving about, coming and going from the washroom, without attracting undue attention. And Miss Wilkins and the corpsmen had been in the diet kitchen.

The admiral reached for his personal logbook and turned thoughtfully through it. He said, "You will muster your people as usual after supper, doctor. I hope Mike Way will have returned then."

CHAPTER XXVI

A LUMP IN HIS SOCK

THE diver who faced Mike Way's underwater torch at the door of the *Starfish's* engineroom had no opportunity to think of how best to escape having his suit burned in two and dying from the resultant squeeze. His recoil, slowed by the water, was one of pure reflex action. He twisted, tripped somehow, and dropped to his hands and knees. The jet of flame crackled above him, burning the air out of the chain of tiny bubbles that rose from his exhaust valve.

And at the same time, the murderous fury that blazed within the big chief torpedoman burned itself down to a degree that permitted reasoning. He didn't want this man dead on the bottom of the sea; he wanted him alive, for questioning.

Mike throttled down the oxygen-fed flame spurting from the torch nozzle, and held the torch wide from his body and his lines as he thrust his bulk forward. Air was coming back into his suit with full force, and all his vigor returned with it. But in his eagerness to lay hands on the other diver, he forgot one thing.

That was the high storm-step of the oval door that led into the after torpedo room, through which the man was scrambling. Mike barked his canvas-encased shin on the step, hooked the brass cap of his heavy shoe on it, and twisted sidewise. With the steadying weight of his shoe disturbed by its raised position, he doubled

over the step and went down on the torpedo room deck.

In the next roaring instant, Mike himself was facing death in a hideous form. The air valve over his left breast caught against the door and was twisted open wide. Air rushed in with mighty force, stretching the suit until he could feel the helmet catching at his chin and threatening to shoot up over his head.

At the same time, the suit was about to spread-eagle him by distending to the point where it flung his arms wide. If that happened no diver would be strong enough to crook an elbow and reach that air valve; the suit would balloon and blow up and the squeeze would follow.

The excess air was creating a positive buoyancy that lifted Mike from the deck. His helmet banged with a loud clatter against the overhead. He yelled with this ringing sound in his ears, trying to tell the tender on deck to shut off his air—forgetting that the telephone wire had been severed. And then he managed to hit the spit valve with his chin just as the helmet was about to break his jaw.

Air rushed out in a big bubble. With the last vestige of his strength, Mike Way got his hand over to the valve and closed it.

He sank back to the deck, right side up. And with the roaring gone, he could hear the clumping of diver's shoes on the rungs of the escape hatch ladder. Whoever the man was, he had escaped.

THEY'D be anxiously tugging on Mike Way's lines, now, up on the fog-swept deck of the *Algonquin*. Not getting any answer, they'd probably be preparing another diver to come down. Mike moved to the base of the escape hatch and caught hold of his lines to give them a reassuring tug. It was answered immediately.

He grinned, despite himself. That three-striper would be plenty sore because he was overstaying the safe twenty minutes, at this depth.

"Nuts!" he muttered in his helmet. "I got a job to do."

Then he retraced his way forward to the galley, lugging the underwater torch with him. In two or three minutes, he had cut away enough of the main induction to enable him to reach an arm into the big pipe in both directions.

For a little while he groped without result. Then his hand closed on a small object. He brought this out of the steel tube and examined it in the glow of the lamp he had left on the galley range.

There was nobody to hear the bitter oaths he shouted into his helmet. In his hand was a clue to the loss of a new, six-million dollar submarine—a clue to the deaths of twenty-two men.

"Twenty-five!" he amended, and cursed again as he retrieved the lamp and the cold torch. He battled his way through the gear adrift in the crew's quarters, he passed the engineman who had been trapped by death at his post, and reached the torpedo room escape hatch. He cleared his lines, and gave four tugs on them as soon as he was out of the hatch trunk.

The diving stage loomed above him at the hundred-foot depth, and he cursed the necessity for decompressing here. Topside, now, the man who had been after this same object Mike Way gripped in his hand might be escaping, somehow. . . .

*

RADIO NINETEENTH NAVAL THIRTEENTH
1720 BT
LIEUT. VINCENT AYRES USS CONSOLATION
BT
FINANCIAL POSITION WESTCO IRON WORKS NONE TOO SECURE DEPENDS ENTIRELY ACCEPTANCE OF SUBMARINES NOW BUILDING LEARNED WEST BORROWED CASH BOND HAS HAD SOME LABOR TROUBLE AT YARD TROUBLE APPARENTLY SMOOTHED OUT RECENTLY WHEN MELHORNE WAS MADE CHIEF ENGINEER IN ACTIVE CHARGE ATTEMPTING CHECK ON GUNS SERIAL NUMBER BT
SIMMONS
TOD 1725

VINCE AYRES signed for the message read it, and started from his room to deliver it to the admiral. One of the *Consolation's* hospital corpsmen overtook him at a run in the passageway.

"Dr. Ayres!" the man panted. "Thorpe—he's badly hurt! Maybe dead."

Vince wheeled. "Thorpe?" he exclaimed. "Good Lord! Where is he?"

"They're taking him into the surgical ward, sir. This way."

Vince hurried there. Corpsmen were lifting a blue-clad figure from a stretcher to a dressing table. There was blood streaming down the man's face, and the sturdily-built young stripe-and-a-half doctor was examining a nasty gash on his head.

"Get sutures ready," he told a corpsman. "Let's have some sponges and shears and a razor; the area around the cut will have to be shaved."

"How bad is it?" Vince asked.

The younger doctor looked up. "Only a scalp wound, I'd say, but there may be quite a bit of concussion. The shell weighed quite a bit."

"Shell?"

"Yes. There it is, on that bunk. Somebody dropped it on his head as he came out on the main deck—somebody who was on the deck above!"

Vince looked at the bunk, and saw the missile. It was the babbit-weighted cartridge case Salty Adams had been converting into a lamp stand. The souvenir Adams had brought out of the *Starfish*.

Vince turned to a corpsman who was merely standing by. "Have the word passed for Adams, first-class torpedoman of the *Starfish* crew."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Another corpsman was sponging the blood from the face of the unconscious man. Vince Ayres stepped closer, and then halted in surprise. He bit off the words he was about to say, and turned to the junior grade lieutenant, who was scrubbing up preparatory to suturing the wound. "How was this man identified, doctor?" Vince asked him in a low voice.

"Why, his white hat was on the deck by him when they found him," the other said. "The stencil says John Thorpe. Isn't he—"

"No. He's not Thorpe. My guess is that he's another of the men from the *Starfish*, and was just wearing Thorpe's white hat. Those people had to leave practically all of their clothing in the submarine, and were given dry clothes when they came aboard."

"Good Lord!" the younger doctor exclaimed. "I thought this was probably an accident. But—"

"It wasn't," Vince said grimly. "It was an attempt to murder John Thorpe within a couple of hours after he'd been released from the storeroom where he was locked up. Whoever did it read that stencil on the hat from the deck above, seized the first weapon he could find, and dropped it. It's a wonder this man's alive."

The junior grade officer nodded. "It struck a glancing blow," he said.

Salty Adams was coming into the ward, his seagoing nonchalance shattered for once. Vince said, "Please say

nothing about the mistaken identity. I think it might help us if word is allowed to get around that Thorpe is dying from a cranial injury."

"I understand, Dr. Ayres," said the other.

Vince turned to meet Adams. "Get your lamp and come with me," he told the first-class torpedoman.

They went to Admiral Wetherbee's room. Salty Adams was as mystified as anybody over the attack.

"I was in the radio shack, asking one of the radio gadgets to find out how Mike Way is doing,"he said. "I didn't even know the lamp was gone from my room."

"Where is your room?" Vince asked.

It was on the promenade deck, well aft. The door had been open; Adams shared the room with another man from the *Starfish.* "Anybody could have walked in and picked up the lamp," he said.

ADMIRAL Wetherbee sent at once for the chief master-at-arms, then turned a quizzical look on Vince. "Any chance of getting fingerprints off that three-inch cartridge case? Brass records prints easily, as any man who's ever polished brightwork in the Navy knows."

Vince shook his head. "When Thorpe was found, they thought it was an accident, sir. Probably half a dozen men handled that lamp before we brought it back here. And I have an idea the person we are dealing with is far too clever not to think of taking precautions against leaving fingerprints. It would have been a simple matter for him to handle that lamp stand with a handkerchief, or something else."

The big chief entered. Admiral Wetherbee said, "Find Thorpe and lock him up again. Don't let anybody see you do this, and don't mention it to anyone. Thorpe is supposed to have been very badly hurt; in fact, he's about to die. That comes straight from the scuttlebutt, Chief, and you can spread it."

"Aye, aye, sir," the master-at-arms said. "Thorpe's already below, sir. I was having him clean up that storeroom where he stayed."

"Very good," the admiral said. "Just keep him there."

They dismissed Salty Adams. Vince sank into a chair. "Well," he mused, "the murderer has scored two misses in a row. Maybe he'll strike out. He appears to be slipping; but so far as I can see he's still slipping through our fingers. Here is a bit of information I just received from Intelligence, sir. It doesn't clarify the situation very much."

The admiral scarcely glanced at the yellow communications sheet. "Yes, I received the same intelligence—along with other information which may and may not be pertinent. But I think you are being overly pessimistic when you say our man is slipping through our fingers, doctor. By the way, have you been told that the *Consolation* has received orders to return to port?"

Vince looked up in surprise. "No, I haven't. When?"

"Orders came from the commandant a little while ago. The ship isn't needed here now that all the *Starfish* survivors are aboard, and raising of the submarine may be left to the civilian salvage crew. We are to get under way as soon as Mike Way has been returned aboard.

"Now let's take a look at this work and drill schedule of mine. '2030 Go into Condition of Readiness No. 2. All hands battle stations. Darken ship. 2040—or when contact is made—Trap murderer.' "

"Just how literally is that schedule to be interpreted?" Vince interrupted with a shade of annoyance. "Have you actually arranged for the ship to be darkened at half past eight—we may be under way by that time—or is this a smoke screen?"

The admiral smiled. "I am referring to the only portion of this ship over which I exercise any control at all," he said with gentle dignity. "This room. Now, let's discuss the strategy and tactics to be employed. . . ."

*

MIKE WAY was back in the iron doctor aboard the *Algonquin:* fully conscious this time, and suffering from no physical pain. Mentally, however, he died an agonizing death with each crawling minute.

"Come on—shake it up—shake it up!" he begged the pharmacist's mate who had entered the chamber with him. "I've got to get out of here!"

"Keep your shirt on, Chief," the corpsman returned mildly. "The *Consolation* won't sail without you. You'll be back aboard that bedpan barge in about two hours. Isn't that fast enough?"

"Hell no!" Mike growled. He swung one of the heavy diver's socks he had worn. It was still wet from the water that had leaked into his suit through the side of his exhaust valve. And now it was stuffed with the small object he had removed from the main induction of the *Starfish.*

The pharmacist's mate grinned. "You're not in a hurry," he kidded. "Not with three hashmarks on your sleeve. I guess you've got plenty of time to do in this outfit. If I had that much time to do, I'd go over the hill."

"Sure!" the big chief torpedoman flared. "I'm a thirty-year man. And where do I spend my time? In these damn tanks!"

The needle on the pressure dial swung slowly to the left each time air was valved out of the chamber. The heat of compression decreased with the needle's crawl, and the nitrogen bubbles in Mike Way's blood were working off in the same proportion. He inhaled from an oxygen mask to speed the action of his respiratory and circulatory systems; and he very nearly got on an oxygen jag.

But it was a full two hours before the door was opened and he stepped out into fresh, foggy air. Darkness had crept in over the sea. He waited for what seemed a long time before the motor sailer from the *Consolation* chugged alongside. It had made another trip earlier, and there was a flag-draped casket in the *Consolation.* Alexander's. *Twenty-five,* Mike Way told himself.

He had asked no questions aboard the *Algonquin,* nor had he told those in the salvage tug anything of that desperate battle forty fathoms down. It wasn't exactly unusual for a telephone line to be severed against some sharp surface while a diver was working in a submarine.

But now there was one more jigsaw fragment fitted into place, and the pattern of remembered horror had begun to take fantastic shape. And there was that blue sock, with the lump that suggested Christmas eve. The lump, itself, filled a vacant space in the puzzle of mystery and murder.

Mike Way held the sock carefully as he climbed the accommodation ladder to the *Consolation's* deck. "Reporting aboard after diving duty, sir," he announced to the officer of the deck, and then faced aft to salute the quarterdeck.

A bosun's pipe shrilled, and a detail of seamen immediately set to work shipping the accommodation ladder and securing it for sea.

CHAPTER XXVII

A KNIFE FOR THE ADMIRAL

VINCE AYRES mustered his party in the isolation ward just after supper, calling the roll while Evelyn checked off the absentees. Everybody answered to his name except John Thorpe and Mike Way. Lieutenant Everett Brill, freshly shaven and wearing service

dress blues some officer in the *Consolation* had lent him, was back. He still wore a worried look, Vince noticed, and two days of confinement seemed to have added remarkably to the paleness of his once-red face.

Vince looked up after the roll had been called. "We all know what happened to young Thorpe," he said quietly. "I can tell you nothing, except that he is still alive."

Victor Melhorne's pale eyes plainly said, "I told you so!" He had criticized Vince Ayres, the doctor remembered, for failure to keep Thorpe locked up.

"Mike Way dived again today, despite the fact that he suffered a bad attack of bends last night," Vince went on. "I don't expect that he will be able to attend this hearing; in fact, he may have to be left aboard the *Algonquin.* As you also know, we are scheduled to get under way in a few minutes."

Martin West shifted his big bulk uncomfortably. He said, "What happens when we reach port? Will Melhorne and Bedell and I be released from—from this damned ship?"

Vince spread his hands and noted the expressions of the three civilians. West was angry and importantly annoyed; Bedell's dark face was intense. Melhorne wore his customary cold, efficient-looking engineer's expression.

"That will be a matter for the district authorities to decide," Vince informed them. He sighed, and added: "I'm afraid all of us are in for a siege of intensified questioning and investigation. You may as well understand the Navy's determination to get to the bottom of this affair. Doubtless Admiral Wetherbee will be relieved by an active duty officer in the district. He'll be new on the job, with only the admiral's log and the transcript Miss Brill has kept to work from. Naturally, he'll have questions of his own to ask."

"That's all very well," Melhorne said. "But we have a ship to raise."

He glared at Vince.

Foster Bedell shrugged. "Perhaps," he said quietly, "it would be possible for each of us to make a deposition covering all that we know—or I should say all we *don't* know—after which we might be permitted to get back to work. I think Mr. West might be able to arrange that."

Martin West swelled slightly at this tribute to his importance. His daughter patted his hand and smiled at him. Vince said, "I hope you are able to proceed with the salvage operations without delay. Well, let's get on with this business. Mr. Melhorne—we'll begin with you, please."

THE anchor chain was rumbling up as Melhorne went silently into the glass-enclosed nurse's office. Evelyn and Vince followed; the doctor motioned for Melhorne to take a chair. Looking outside, he could see the anxiety in Barbara West's dark eyes.

Melhorne said, with chill sarcasm, "I understood there would be no more need of this. Didn't Admiral Wetherbee say he knows who the murderer is?"

Vince faced him quietly. "I'll read you the latest radio report received by the admiral from Naval Intelligence ashore, Mr. Melhorne," he said.

RADIO NINETEENTH NAVAL THIRTEENTH
1840 BT
REAR ADMIRAL J. K. WETHERBEE USS CONSOLATION BT
RECORD OF FIREARMS SALES SHOWS THIRTY TWO CALIBER AUTOMATIC THAT MAKE AND SERIAL NUMBER PURCHASED LAST MONTH BY VICTOR MELHORNE BT
SIMMONS
TOD 1847

Melhorne stiffened. "You mean," he demanded, "that it was my gun used in the attempt to kill Mike Way?"

"Exactly," Vince said.

"Then it was stolen from my room," the engineer said. "I hadn't missed it. Where is the gun now?"

Vince took it from his coat pocket and handed it over to the other man. Barbara West could see this move through the glass. She put a nervous hand to her lips. She was still afraid, Vince thought, that Victor Melhorne was the murderer.

The shipyard engineer examined the weapon in silence. There was a throb of engines under the deck; the *Consolation* trembled, and listed slightly as she turned under the thrust of her screws.

MELHORNE said, "Yes, it's mine. I bought it last month, because we were having a little trouble at the Westco yard. A radical labor leader, so-called, was attempting to throw a wrench into our production schedule. And in times like these, you can't take too many precautions against spies and saboteurs—not when you're working on Government contracts."

"We were interrupted when I questioned you before," Vince said. "You appeared rather certain that young Thorpe was guilty. I think you'll agree subsequent events have tended to disprove that."

"Well?" Melhorne parried.

"You didn't mention saboteurs, then. You will agree that the pattern of things makes it appear that the murders are definitely linked to the sinking of the *Starfish.* Would you say sabotage could have been responsible for that sinking?"

"Certainly, it *could* have been," Melhorne snapped. "But I was aboard, and I saw no evidence of it. It's my belief that the human element was responsible."

Vince smiled faintly. Melhorne was echoing the words of Martin West, his employer, in intimating that Everett Brill had given the order for the full crash dive before his ship was rigged for diving.

He said, "Well, it isn't the duty of this inquiry, of course, to branch into a technical investigation as to the causes of that disaster. We are only interested, officially, in any connection between the sinking and the murders. I think that will be all, just now, Mr. Melhorne."

He looked at his watch. It was five after eight. The ship was under way, and that meant Mike Way had returned aboard—unless, indeed, he had been forced to stay in the recompression chamber aboard the *Algonquin.*

MELHORNE made no move to go. He squirmed under the first real uneasiness he had ever displayed, and he asked the question Vince had known he would ask:

"Where was the gun found, doctor?"

Vince watched him carefully. "In Miss West's room."

Melhorne sprang to his feet. "Then it was planted there!" he exclaimed. "The murderer is attempting to evade detection by switching the blame to her. She's entirely innocent."

"I'm inclined to believe you're right, and I certainly hope so," Vince said gently. "But the fact remains that she knew the gun was there, and the fact also remains that you've been very much afraid that she *isn't* entirely innocent. Just as she has feared that *you* aren't."

"That's a lie!" Melhorne blazed. "You're only—"

"Just a minute," Vince said. "Nobody is accusing either of you. But I can suggest a course of action you should take immediately. Sit down with Miss West and have a heart-to-heart talk. Tell each other, freely, all that you know, and remove this fear—which amounts to suspicion—from each other's mind."

A corpsman knocked on the door, and Evelyn admitted him. He handed Vince a sheet torn from the admiral's logbook.

Victor Melhorne drew a long breath. "Thank you, Dr. Ayres," he said sincerely. "I believe that would be a wise thing to do."

He went out into the ward. Evelyn said, "That was very kind of you, Dr. Beatrice Fairfax. But will it help the investigation any for them to compare stories and agree on an airtight account?"

Vince grinned at her. "They'd have done that, anyway, sooner or later," he said. "And if they're in love, why let them suffer?" He removed his glasses, polishing them and looking almost boyish without them as he continued to smile at the girl. "I wouldn't want you to feel that way about me, Evelyn," he added.

She looked down, and the clear color came into her cheeks. "You mean you wouldn't want me to be in love with you?" she asked softly.

Vince Ayres knew in that moment that he had won one case, at least—one far more important than the solution of a murder mystery. He said, "You darling! I'll discuss that with you a little later. Come on into the ward."

OUTSIDE he cleared his throat and announced that he had just received an order from Admiral Wetherbee. It was written in the old man's neat, precise hand, and it conformed to the pattern prescribed for official correspondence. Vince read it aloud:

From: Rear Admiral J. K. Wetherbee USN (Retd.)
To: Lieut. Vincent Ayres. (MC) USN.
Subject: Murder inquiry, cessation of.

1. Pursuant to orders of this date from the Commandant, Nineteenth Naval District and Operating Base, you will cease present activities bearing on the investigation into the murder of Lieut. Frederick McQuaid, USN, and subsequent crimes.

2. All transcript of testimony and other data obtained will be prepared in typewritten form for the scrutiny, along with Admiral Wetherbee's personal log, of a board of inquiry to be convened in the Consolation as soon after her arrival in port as circumstances will permit.

J. K. Wetherbee
Rear Admiral, USN (Retd.)

There was a momentary silence in the ward when Vince had finished reading. Then Melhorne said, disgustedly: "The admiral's log will be of great help, I'm sure!"

"More than you—or even I—know," Vince answered. "You must remember that he sleeps very little. He was awake that night when McQuaid was killed. We have seen only the portions of the logbook which he wanted us to see."

Barbara West stood with a little toss of her head. "Does this mean we are free to go, now?" she asked sarcastically.

"You may," Vince nodded. "As my last official act in connection with this somewhat unpleasant duty of which I have just been relieved, I would like to thank all of you for your coöperation. And," he added with grim significance, "to wish each of you the best of luck."

Melhorne took Barbara West's arm and hurried her out of the ward with a polite nod to Vince. The others filed past him to shake his hand as if he were, indeed, relinquishing a Navy command. Martin West said, "I'm sorry if we haven't appeared to be doing all we could to help, doctor. There's been so much on my mind . . ."

Foster Bedell said, "You actually made it a pleasure to be questioned, Dr. Ayres. I hope the shore board is as kind."

And Everett Brill gripped his hand warmly. "They handed you a tough detail," he declared. "You did the best you could with the tools you had."

That was a Navy maxim. Hearing it, Vince felt better. But he alone of the people in the ward knew that the night's work was not yet completed—not if the admiral's plans could be counted on to work out properly. . . .

THE admiral looked at his watch. Twenty-nine past eight: 2029 by the Navy's twenty-four hour clock. He maneuvered his wheel chair a couple of feet to starboard, which was not exactly an easy performance with the roll of the ship, and placed his copy of Mahan on his bedside locker. Then, as if by an afterthought, he shuffled the books there so that his log was on top.

Only the reading lamp was burning at the head of his bed. Admiral Wetherbee muttered to himself, "Darken ship!" and switched out his light.

As if this had been a signal, the door, which already stood partly open, widened to admit the shadowy figure of a big man who carried a bulky burden.

He asked in a low tone, "All set, sir?"

"Carry out your mission," the admiral chuckled.

He was enjoying every moment of this, just as he had enjoyed fighting in two wars and playing at fighting a score of others in the Navy's annual Fleet Problems. Once more he was employing strategy against the enemy: an enemy as invisible as if his masts were over the far horizon.

The big man moved to the bed and turned down the covers; and beneath them arranged the bulky object he had carried.

"You're sure you don't want me to stand by in here, sir?" he whispered.

"Take your battle station," the admiral answered; and the other went out.

One bell sounded faintly from the bridge of the *Consolation.* The admiral countermarched his wheelchair forward, turned it smartly in the darkness, and came to a full stop. He was near the forward bulkhead some twelve feet from his bed, and now he settled down to his vigil.

A single light had been left burning in the passageway. The admiral's partly-opened door swung gently with the ship's rolling, admitting a faint glow that was bluish and unreal into that portion of the room occupied by the bed. The admiral sat fully erect, his plaster-encased leg thrust straight out before him on the wheelchair footrest.

When a man is seventy, he has learned patience; when he is a Navy man, he has learned it long before. Waiting here in the darkness, the admiral could listen to the rhythmical wash of the sea along the side and hear the thump of the screws beneath; he could even see a star, now and then, swinging across one of the portholes like the trucklights on a tall ship.

This was not greatly different from other watches he had stood in the blackness of nights long past, straining his eyes from the bridge of his ship, responsibility lying heavily on his gaunt shoulders.

The responsibility was there now, he told himself, and he remembered with a pang of regret that tomorrow the *Consolation* would be back in harbor, moored prosaically alongside a dock. Well, it was something to have gone to sea again, even if only for a little while.

He wished he had thought to have somebody raid the officers' galley or one of the diet kitchens for a cold turkey leg and a bottle of milk.

The minutes were long. After an endless procession of them, he heard two bells on the bridge. Nine o'clock—2100—and he was already behind schedule. And the sil-

very-sweet, sad music of taps was sounding through the ship; the last note lingered and was blended and lost in the song of the sea's running along the hull plates. Other lights were going out, now; there was silence between the decks.

It was only a little time, then, until the admiral's door opened a trifle wider; opened so softly no one could have heard. There had been no sound in the passageway; there was none now in the room. Shadows do not make sound, and it was a shadow moving here in the gloom.

The admiral's keen old eyes watched its progress. He could make out a bluejacket's uniform—that would be a peacoat with its collar turned high to muffle the man's face—and a close-fitting watchcap on his head.

The shadow moved silently near the bed, within easy reach of the locker where Mahan and the admiral's logbook lay. The old man who watched saw the shadow raise his arm. The dim light shone faintly on the blade of a large knife.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SITUATION IN HAND

MAHAN had said: *The enemy must not be fended off, but smitten down.* And Admiral Wetherbee went suddenly into action under this precept. The prowler whirled, still crouching, still holding the knife out from his body, and the admiral heard his muttered exclamation. He had sensed that a trap was set here; that was no man lying in the admiral's bed, but merely a Navy hammock, rolled and lashed for stowing.

But the strange, wheeled attack came swiftly out of the darkness and there was no time to prepare to meet it. The admiral sent the chair into motion with a powerful thrust of his arms, and the roll of the ship helped to give him momentum.

He let out a yell that would have been loud in the teeth of a Cape Race blizzard. He felt the jar that sent a shock running through his out-thrust leg, and the wheelchair careened dizzily against the bed.

The prowler was buckling with a grunt of pain, grabbing at the bedside locker in a futile effort to preserve his balance. That footrest had rammed him just above the knees; he fell rolling on the sloping deck, and the locker came down with a shower of books and hospital gear.

The long knife flew from the man's hand. Admiral Wetherbee had already hurled his gaunt body from the wheelchair, forgetting to favor the plaster-weighted leg in his eagerness to attack.

Ensuing seconds were violent and loud and confused. The admiral grappled with the enemy he had smitten down, but his momentum carried him on; he rolled over the man's wiry, desperately struggling form, and brought up against the bulkhead near the door. In the next instant the man was on his feet and darting into the passageway.

"All hands!" bellowed the admiral. "Look lively, out there!"

He rolled through the door, hampered by the plaster cast and the nautical discovery that it wouldn't clear the doorway fore and aft, but had to be turned athwartships. Somebody leaped over his leg and landed running. The dimly-lighted passageway was suddenly loud with shouts and action.

He saw Vince Ayres running past, headed aft. Vince shouted: "Look out, Mike. *He's got a gun!*"

And the admiral came right side up outside his door to look aft and see the prowler fleeing up the ladder leading to the promenade deck, with the hand chains giving off a frantic rattle. The old sea dog smiled grimly, for he had arranged to have that hatch cover temporarily secured, and there was no opening at the top of the ladder.

The man in the peacoat was trapped. Big Mike Way lunged up the ladder, clutching at his ankles. The man kicked desperately at Mike's face, beat off the attack briefly, and went a step or two higher.

He found the hatch dogged shut, then. He turned the white blur of his face in the admiral's direction. The gun was in his hand.

Mike Way ignored the gun. Vince Ayres was charging to the chief torpedoman's aid, but there was no more room on the ladder. Mike Way leaped up it again with a savage fury.

The gun laid a loud, reverberating noise into the passageway, and Admiral Wetherbee didn't want to look. He heard the heavy roll and thump down the ladder . . .

And then he heard Mike Way's panting voice. The big chief torpedoman swore.

"He shot himself! It's—it's Foster Bedell!"

IT WAS nearly an hour before the excitement had died away and Admiral Wetherbee was propelled forward to the isolation ward where Captain McKee had ordered the *Starfish* survivors and the party from the hospital to assemble.

The captain himself was on hand; he rose respectfully as the old sea dog was wheeled in, and everybody else came to attention. It was almost like going aboard a ship to inspect it, or to pay an official call: the admiral needed only sideboys and the shrill of a bosun's pipe to complete the illusion.

He said, gruffly, "Carry on!" and they sat down with the admiral facing them.

Captain McKee said, "Well, sir, we're all waiting to hear what happened, and how you did it."

"I?" the admiral repeated. "I didn't, sir. The credit belongs to Dr. Ayres, and to Miss Brill, and—above all—to Chief Mike Way. But"—and he smiled—"when a sailor gets old, he loves to spin yarns. So I'll tell you how. Mike, give me that sock."

The big chief brought it forward. Admiral Wetherbee reached inside and drew out the shattered and twisted remains of a clock, its dial still intact but faded by sea water.

"This," he said, "is enough to explain what happened in the *Starfish*. This is what is left of a time bomb which Foster Bedell placed in the main induction that ventilated the after compartments. He planted it at a point where it would unseat the valve at the instant of explosion, without doing a great amount of damage to the induction itself."

Lieutenant Brill uttered an exclamation, and James, the executive officer, snapped bolt upright. "But Admiral Wetherbee," the dapper little officer said, "Bedell couldn't have had a chance to place any bomb there that day. And besides, would he have done it when he knew *he'd* be aboard, himself?"

"This chronometer," the admiral explained, "was of a very reliable and accurate make. It would run eight days. Sometime within eight days before the disaster, Bedell had the opportunity to plant the bomb."

He held up the log of the Starfish. "I began to suspect a time bomb the first time I examined Captain Brill's log. This log shows that test maneuvers were executed *on the minute* according to a schedule laid down a week or two in advance. Very commendable promptness, Brill; the Navy must move on time.

"Well, Foster Bedell also noticed this strict adherence to schedule. He knew that the supreme test of the *Star-*

fish's trials—the full crash dive—would take place at 1530 on 9 January. He set his chronometer accordingly. It was no trick for a man with Bedell's technical skill to manufacture a bomb."

Martin West's face was flabby and gray. He shook his head. "I don't believe it!" he burst out harshly. "I *can't* believe it! Why—why would he have done this?"

He stared around him with baffled, incredulous anger, looking for his answer.

"We will come to that, presently," the admiral said. "Now, Lieutenant James, you ask whether a man would act to destroy a ship when he, himself was aboard. The answer is that Foster Bedell didn't think he'd be aboard —not when he planted his bomb."

Victor Melhorne had been sitting with shoulders hunched and his bleak eyes staring at the bulkhead. Barbara West was close at his side; she held his hand in both of hers. Melhorne shook himself now, like a man surprised out of a trance.

"Maybe you're right!" he said in his thin, metallic voice. "You remember, Mr. West: Bedell was to have been at the yards after the first week of the *Starfish's* trials. The day before the full crash dive, we decided it would be better to have two observers aboard. Bedell was to be stationed aft, checking on the trim of the ship and the performance of the stern planes. But he wasn't aft at the time we dived; I never thought of that before."

"HE WASN'T aft because he wanted to live," the admiral said. "Oh, he had nerve—plenty of cold-blooded, unemotional nerve. When he was ordered aboard, he knew that if he refused to go and the explosion came off on schedule, somebody might eventually suspect him. He was reasonably certain of rescue—so long as he stayed forward."

"I remember something, sir." It was Thorpe, holding up his hand like a schoolboy. "That day. Bedell came into the galley several times, sir."

"Looking for a chance to try fishing the bomb out through the galley blower," the admiral nodded. "He didn't get that chance."

Vince Ayres said, "But admiral, a bomb—an explosion —why wouldn't it have been heard?"

The admiral looked at Everett Brill. "You tell the doctor, Captain."

"Well," Brill said slowly, "if it had been a very big explosion, of course it would have been heard. But we had shifted control to below, which meant nobody was in the conning tower. The warning growler was going. The sea was rough and slamming against the conning tower when the eyeports went awash. And I suppose most of the sound went aft, traveling through the induction."

"That's the way I had it figured out," said Admiral Wetherbee. "Perhaps the men aft *did* hear it. Who's left to tell about hearing any sound? Only Thorpe. And a man can forget a little thing like a noise, under the strain of what followed. But Lieutenant McQuaid—the one man who could have told us what happened—did remember one thing. The smell."

Brill looked up quickly. "You meant it wasn't—" he began.

"It wasn't any smell of liquor McQuaid was trying to tell about, subconsciously. It was the smell of *powder,* Brill—the smell of whatever explosive Bedell used. It was forced down the induction by the inrushing water."

Martin West rubbed his hand across his gray face, as if trying to erase everything that had happened from his memory. Failing, he said, wearily: "But *why,* Admiral— why? Foster Bedell helped build that ship. He was a good engineer; one of the best. He'd been with me for five years."

"EXACTLY!" the admiral said. "That was why he thought he should have been retained as chief engineer. And when Mr. Melhorne became engaged to marry your daughter, and you promoted him to that post —over Bedell—Bedell nursed a grudge. Did you know that he went to see your chief competitor, Pacific Maritime, the day after Melhorne's promotion?"

West was surprised. "No! Did he?"

"He did. He applied for a job as their chief engineer. That job depended on Pacific Maritime's chances of taking the submarine building contract away from you. So Bedell, seeking revenge against both you and Melhorne, and wanting the higher-paid position, hoped to give Pacific Maritime a chance at the contracts by making the sinking look like a pure case of fault in the ship. He—"

"Just a minute, please!" Melhorne's brittle voice interrupted. "How did you learn so much about Bedell's movements, sir?"

"Captain Brill's log—which was kept very thoroughly —revealed that Bedell was aboard the first week of the trials, but was detached. Then the log showed, later, that he returned aboard. As for the other information, I've had a couple of Intelligence operatives and some other people looking up the records of everybody on shore."

"Go on, please," Captain McKee said. "How would Bedell have made the sinking look like an accident?"

"By diving and removing the evidence of the bomb," the admiral said. "He dived yesterday—it's yesterday, now—from the *Westsal.* That was a diver's knife he dropped in my room. You, Melhorne, knew that he dived, but you don't know what happened. Tell them, Chief."

Mike Way recounted, with a great deal of simple modesty, the attempt to kill him by severing his air line. He said he thought Bedell must have killed Alexander, earlier, by pushing him from the *Starfish's* deck.

"It was foggy, sir. Nobody on the *Algonquin* knew the *Westsal* had a diver down. The lines might get tangled."

Melhorne frowned. "I see. Bedell himself was supposed to have taken care of notifying the Navy ship. We weren't right over the submarine; he had to land on the bottom and walk a way. He phoned up that he was inspecting the hull from the outside."

"And he probably saw the slack in Alec's lines, hanging over the side!" Mike Way exclaimed. "He pulled Alec down, and jammed the lines under the stern planes. He climbed on the sub, and by that time I was inside."

"Bedell *had* to be the first in the flooded compartments," the admiral resumed. "He knew Mike Way had discovered something suspicious; he didn't know what. On his first dive, Mike found a portion of this chronometer's stout steel spring blown out through the unseated valve and sticking through a vent in the conning tower. If Bedell had been able to get to that induction first, and remove the fragments of his bomb mechanism, there might have been nothing left to show what really happened.

"That brings us to the murders. Well, Bedell knew McQuaid had smelled the powder. He went through that vacant quiet room, got the brick, picked up Evelyn's cape on the balcony. He watched from outside until the corpsman left McQuaid's room. He entered, and heard the corpsman chopping ice for the ice cap. So he timed his blows to that chopping.

"McQuaid would never talk, then. But if McQuaid had smelled the fumes of that bomb, why shouldn't Cardoni and Thorpe have smelled them, also? For the same reason, then, he killed Cardoni. He didn't try to kill Thorpe just then, because Thorpe himself was suspected of the murders, and it was worth Bedell's while to let him live.

"But Mike Way was about to reveal something he'd found on the submarine, and Bedell knew it. He had a

gun of his own, but he knew Melhorne had one in his room. It was smart to use another man's gun. He missed murdering Mike Way, nearly got caught, and had to get rid of the gun. If it had been his, he certainly would have thrown it over the side. But it was to his advantage to cast suspicion somewhere else."

THE admiral paused, then smiled at Barbara West. "I think you could tell us what he did with that automatic, Miss West," he said kindly.

"Yes, I can," the girl answered, flushing uncomfortably. "He must have opened Victor's door, saw nobody was in, and tossed the gun on the bunk. I—I went there looking for Victor, and saw it. I was afraid—you understand."

"Perfectly," smiled the admiral.

"Well, I hid the gun in my room. You can't blame me for denying it, later—"

"Not when you're in love, my dear young lady," agreed the admiral. "Well, that just about finishes the story. We know that Bedell was still afraid Thorpe might know too much, and that he thought he saw his chance to kill Thorpe by dropping that heavy cartridge case on his head. It happened to be another man who was wearing Thorpe's white hat. And I'm happy to inform you that the man isn't seriously hurt.

"Now," he went on half-humorously, "I have some confessions of my own to make. In the first place, my logbook never did contain anything of real importance. Dr. Ayres and Miss Brill managed to create the illusion that the log held the key to the mystery, however.

"Meanwhile"—and the admiral smiled at Vince Ayres—"I helped build up that bit of camouflage by having a message sent from shore, ordering me to take charge. That was only more strategy, doctor, and I assure you the commandant understood it as such."

Vince smiled back. "It doesn't matter whether he did or not," he said. "You're being too modest, sir. You built the trap, set it and sprung it in such a manner Bedell knew his guilt had been discovered. Your logbook had attained such apparent importance that Bedell intended to kill you and destroy it. And, finally, you charged him—in a wheelchair."

"Mechanized forces afloat," murmured the admiral as a ripple of laughter crossed the room. He looked at his watch, and remembered that most people were asleep at this time of morning, and so he suggested that the meeting be broken up.

But there were dozens who wanted to shake hands with him. Barbara West gave him a hug that left lipstick on his gaunt, leathery old cheek. And tall, military-looking Captain McKee made a remark that sent happiness tingling through the admiral's veins.

"Too damn bad," the captain declared, "that the Government sees fit to retire some men in the prime of their lives."

LATER, the admiral slowly propelled his wheelchair out to the open deck where he could feel the wind on his face and watch the stars swinging overhead. The fog was gone; there was no longer any ring around the moon to denote stormy weather ahead. The music of wind and wave was sweeter than anything the admiral had ever heard—that is, until he heard a girl's low, happy laugh.

It was Evelyn Brill. Vince Ayres was standing very near to her. Without the slightest feel of guilt at eavesdropping, the admiral saw Vince put his arms around her.

He chuckled slyly to himself, then, and propelled the wheelchair back to his room. There was a note lying on his logbook. He read it, smiled happily, and made an entry in his log:

USS CONSOLATION 14 January
At Sea, enroute Nineteenth Naval District.
0105 Secured from General Quarters.
0130 Admiral J. K. WETHERBEE, USN (Retd) hauled down his flag, relinquishing temporary command of murder investigation.
0138 Lieut. Vincent AYRES (MC) USN finally cleared decks for action. When last sighted, he was engaged at very close quarters and seemed to have the situation well in hand . . .
0143 Received official confirmation of victory won by Lieut. AYRES, in form of wedding invitation, ceremony to take place 22 January (or as soon thereafter as resignation of BRILL, Evelyn, from NNC can be effected.)
NOTE: I hope all their sons are midshipmen.

THE END

Meet the Author

Men who Make the Argosy—Jim Kjelgaard

AFTER we got in the story, "Cross Your Bridges" *(page 49 of this issue)* we couldn't hold out any longer; put on our galoshes and old fur tippet, and struck out for Dabbit Run to see Wayne McCloud about this fellow Kjelgaard. Couldn't get ahold of Kjelgaard himself, and nearly got stuck in a bear trap on our way; but McCloud was plumb willin' to talk, once we got to him.

"Jim," he told us, "comes from good sound Scandinavian stock. Father's a doctor over in the Pennsylvania mountains, and the whole family, includin' a sister, are as crazy about huntin' an' trappin' as me. Only *they* never get in any jams with the game warden. Sure, they get their deer every season. Brother's a state ranger, but he's as square-shootin' as Lem Knowles.

"Jim's got his own family, you know. Yeah. 'Bout two years ago he's up in Wisconsin, fly-castin' on the Wolf River. After a while he notices a gal upstream a ways, and darned if she ain't castin' better'n he can. Jim watches her a while, then says she's the only woman that can outcast him and he's goin' to marry her. Which he does.

"Understand they're livin' in Milwaukee now, and they've got a daughter about a year old. When Jim ain't writin' he's generally out in the woods some place, or fishin'. Likes to tie his own flies. He's up on American history, an' can tell you anything about Indians you want to know. Hound dogs fascinates him too; he can trace 'em right back to the very beginnin' of the breed."

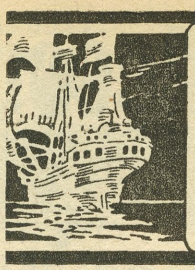
AT about this point Wayne McCloud thought we might be hungry, and we were, and the result was the finest venison steak we've ever set our teeth in. We didn't ask him where he got it, or how; but after a while he confided in us. "Present from Jim," he said. "He sends me a haunch of it every year."

"That's fine," we said, trying not to look at the rifle on Wayne McCloud's wall. "You must have known Jim for a long time."

"Well," said Wayne, "he's only been sellin' these stories the last four-five years. Before that I only know what he's told me. Went to college for a while, worked in a factory, wrote an article or two for an outdoor magazine— But you see, he couldn't stay inside. I guess he just had to hunt and fish and so on, and just had to write about it. He's done some travelin', too—Canada, the West—and always outdoors."

There was a long whistle from the little two-car train that goes through Dabbit Run, so we had to leave. But all the way back home we remembered that venison Wayne McCloud had set out. There's just one thing that irritates us a little bit about Jim Kjelgaard: he never sent us a haunch of venison. But there was that one time he *did* offer to send us a skunk!

—The Editors



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

SOME time ago, impelled by a letter from G. R. Townsend, we discussed the psychology of reading in these columns. You may remember that Mr. Townsend had some very interesting things to say about his enjoyment of fiction.

A well described scene, he said, came to life in his mind as if he were seeing a picture. We were fascinated by this and we still are; and now we find that a number of other readers absorb a story in much the same fashion as Mr. Townsend. In other words, they actually see the setting and the action taking place.

Thinking about all this, we have carried the reading process a step further. If these visual-minded people see the story happening, then perhaps there are others who take part in it. Yes, we're getting pretty fancy, but don't go yet. After all, a good many of you must have experienced the actual physical tension of reading a very dramatic piece of narrative. Perhaps you have even wept when the heroine wept—it's not unheard of.

Well, if a reader had an exceptional capacity for identifying himself with a story, he would walk step by step with the hero, fighting his battles, suffering his wounds. He would not only see the story, he would live it.

But there are dangers here, if we follow the thing out. Our reader emerges completely exhausted from a particularly violent yarn; indeed, he may discover scarcely healed wounds on his body. He has triumphed, of course, but he has had a rough time of it; and sober reflection might very well lead him to sue ARGOSY for assault and battery.

Enough of this; here is the mail.

R. D. WEBER

Having just read G. R. Townsend's explanation of reading and visual mind pictures, it struck me that that is what I do when I read a good interesting story. As I have always read a lot, it brings to mind that I have read that way for years.

I have been a constant reader of ARGOSY for thirty years and have stuck by it through thick and thin. I was very much surprised and really disappointed when the style of ARGOSY was changed, but I am getting used to it now. It was quite a shock at first.

I have always liked the type of reading in ARGOSY for as long as I have read it, and thirty years is no short time. Just finished "Farewell to the Indies", and it hit the spot. I read that you have a Dave McNally story coming up, which is okay.

Coming back to the visual reading, I believe that most people read that way but have never thought of it like that. Seems reasonable. I have been the world over in just that way and hope to travel many and many a mile in the future. Maybe I am just a dreamer.

Well, bon voyage, and keep ARGOSY in its own class.
Denver, Colorado.

GLAD that Mr. Weber is becoming acclimated to the new ARGOSY. . . . Now here is another reader who feels a kinship for Mr. Townsend. This correspondent, by the way, seems to have established some sort of record in saving back issues. At least it looks like a record to us. He challenges anyone to match him, so we expect to hear further of this subject.

JOHN B. McBRIDE

I agree with G. R. Townsend of Dallas, Texas, that to enjoy any type of story the reader must be able to see or visualize the scene as the author wishes him to.

In looking through my collection of "save" stories I came across one printed in ALL-STORY WEEKLY, which I believe was consolidated with ARGOSY somewhere in the 1920's. The name of the story was "Upstairs", by Perley Poore Sheehan, published in April 26, 1919. It is the oldest of the lot in my bundle of "save" stories, as I call them, and I have read it at least twenty times in the last twenty-two years. I wonder if this is a record for keeping a story.

Would appreciate hearing from your readers if anyone has ever saved a magazine story as long as that. "Upstairs" deals with a girl who takes her soldier brother's place in a big New York hotel. Her job is to ice frozen goblets and glasses for the dining room; but the bellboy Jack starts her out on a series of adventures involving spies, and so on.
Chicago, Ill.

IT'S pleasant to have a note from one of our younger readers. What she has to say seems to indicate that the ARGOSY habit can be inherited, and that's splendid. We trust there are a great many of these fortunate children.

MARGARET LESLIE

I am one of your younger readers, fifteen years old to be exact. I enjoy your stories very much, but the pictures for your Western stories simply give me a pain. I might be able to express that stronger, but I would probably be called just a kid by some people.

The story I refer to mostly is "Gunswift", which is very interesting. If the pictures weren't so very, very terrible! This may get me in Dutch with the artist; hope he or she can take it.

I enjoy the Readers' Viewpoint immensely, and if you want to ruin ARGOSY, just omit it. My mother and Dad have been reading ARGOSY for eighteen years and they think it is a swell magazine.
Russellville, Mo.

Our next correspondent, unlike most, is not entirely pleased with the Dikar stories. You'll be interested in his chief objection to them.

WILLIAM ZETTLER, JR.

I have been reading the ARGOSY for ten years and this is the first time I've felt inclined to make a kick. It's about Arthur Leo Zagat's Dikar series.

A couple of years ago it wouldn't have mattered but with international affairs as serious as they are today it seems to me rather bad taste to publish any story whose central theme tends to arouse our traditional racial prejudices. I don't object to this type of story because we need fear what others may think, but because it may start up our own hatreds and passions to the point where they may be detrimental to us.

Anyone who participates in competitive sport knows that when the odds are anywhere near even the cool head will win over the angry one ninety percent of the time. This could also apply in the more serious international games.

Of course, this is only one opinion out

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of many, so that I hardly expect you to take it very seriously: although I do think it is a point any publisher might remember.

Incidentally, unlike other ARGOSY stories (including Zagat's) this particular series has never been able to get me sufficiently interested to read its stories through.

Your magazine is still tops and I close in the belief that you will keep it so.
Canton, Ohio

MR. ZETTLER'S comment is certainly worth thinking about. The fact is, however, that the history of Dikar is one of the most popular series we have published in years. So far, no one else has raised the objection given above. . . . It pleases us tremendously to learn from the letter below that Louis Goldsmith makes no errors in his air stories. We thought he didn't, but you know how we are about mechanical and scientific matters.

COL. JOHN H. GIBSON

Some time ago a friend called my attention to a story in the ARGOSY by Louis Goldsmith. Since that time I've gone back to my boyhood trick of reading the ARGOSY regularly, with special emphasis on the Goldsmith stories.

He has a fine appeal to me and, as I have found, to several of my friends as well. There is an authentic ring to his yarns which wins my vote. I'm satisfied that he must be an old pilot because he's never wrong in his technique although he manages to keep from being confusing.

By the way, I've been wondering if this isn't the man I met out in the Philippines about four or five years ago. At that time he was either on his way to China or on his way back from there. Did some flying with the Chinese, I believe.
Ogden, Utah

Now here is a short note from a newcomer to ARGOSY. He wants as much Surdez as possible, and we hope to give satisfaction.

ROBERT HOLT

I started buying ARGOSY when you started your Zorro novel. The best story complete in the January 25 issue was Surdez' "No Medals for Heroes." I've never read a novel of its type that was up to it.

Publish more of its kind, more by Georges Surdez, and anyone can assure you that your number of permanent customers will grow.
Belvidere, Ill.

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Latest achievement in typewriters! Provides writing perfection with SILENCE. A machine for those who want the advantages of a quiet home or office. This Underwood's Noiseless mechanism eliminates the nerve shattering clatter common to many models. *An aid to better work because it allows clear thinking, reduces fatigue, improves accuracy.* This typewriter disturbs no one, for it is almost impossible to hear it operate a few feet away. **You get all features of an Underwood PLUS Noiseless typing.**

FIRST CHOICE OF TYPISTS

OVER 5,000,000 UNDERWOODS NOW IN USE! Recognized as the finest, strongest built! Here is an office size Underwood with late modern features that give you **SILENT TYPING.** Has all standard equipment—keyboard, 2 colors, [illegible] spacer, automatic reverse, tabulator, etc. **THERE IS NO RISK! SEE BEFORE YOU BUY ON MY 10 DAY NO OBLIGATION TRIAL PLAN.** If you wish, send the machine back at my expense.

INTERNATIONAL TYPEWRITER EXCHANGE
231 W. Monroe St., Dept. 436 Chicago Ill.

EXTRA VALUE!

ROLL-A-WAY SECRETARIAL TYPEWRITER STAND

Two Wings. Correct Working Height. All Metal.

Mounted on casters, can be moved by touch of finger.

For those who have no typewriter stand or handy place to use a machine, I make this special offer. This attractive stand that ordinarily sells for $4.85 can be yours for only $2.00 extra added to your account. **Quality built. Note all its convenient features. (SEE COUPON)**

NO MONEY DOWN 10 DAY TRIAL

Easy Terms-9c A DAY

No obligation. See before you buy on wide open 10 day trial. Pay no money until you test, inspect, compare, and use this Underwood Noiseless. Judge for yourself without hurry and without risk. When you are convinced that this is the biggest typewriter bargain you have ever seen, then say, "I'll Buy." Send only 60c a week or $2.50 a month until term price of only $35.85 is paid. Try it first, enjoy a full 10 days' steady use. THERE IS NO RED TAPE OR INVESTIGATION—MY OFFER IS EXACTLY AS I STATE IT.

2-YEAR GUARANTEE

I back this machine with my personal 2-yr. guarantee that it is in A-1 condition in every respect—that it will give first class service. Over 30 years of fair dealing and my 200,000 satisfied customers prove the soundness of my golden rule policy and prove that dealing direct with me saves you money.

FREE

Complete Course in Touch Typing

A complete home study course of famous Van Zandt Touch Typing system. **Learn to type quickly and easily.** Carefully illustrated. Written expressly for **home use.**

MAIL COUPON NOW · Limited Quantity on Sale!

INTERNATIONAL TYPEWRITER EXCHANGE, Dept. 436, 231 W. Monroe St., Chicago, Ill.

Send Underwood Noiseless (F. O. B. Chicago) for ten days' trial. If I keep it, I will pay $2.50 per month until easy term price ($35.85) is paid. If I am not satisfied I can return it express collect.

Name ..... Age .....

Typewritten signatures not acceptable.

Address .....

City ..... State .....

CAUTION—FOR QUICK SHIPMENT GIVE OCCUPATION AND REFERENCE

☐ Check for typewriter stand ($2.00 extra). Stand sent on receipt of first payment on Underwood.

The lively, husky, he-man flavor of Wrigley's Spearmint Gum is fun to chew.

And daily chewing aids digestion,..helps brighten your teeth.

Buy some today.

The Flavor Lasts

V-25